United Nations CEDAW/C/BLR/4-6

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Distr.: General
19 December 2002
English
Original: Russian

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Combined fourth, fifth and sixth periodic reports of States parties

Belarus*

Introduction

Pursuant to article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Government of Belarus hereby submits its fourth, fifth and sixth periodic report on the implementation of the provisions of the Convention during the period from 1994 to 200[illegible]

The report mainly focuses on information not covered in previous reports.

Prepared in accordance with the general guidelines for preparation of reports by States parties in document CEDAW/C/7/Rev.3, the report draws on information submitted by the competent Ministries and government bodies, and by interested public organizations.

Part I of the report provides an overview of the social and economic situation in the Republic of Belarus, its demography, as well as institutional mechanisms established to implement the provisions of the Convention.

Part II describes the legislative, administrative and other measures adopted in the Republic of Belarus to give effect to the provisions of the Convention in accordance with specific articles.

* The present document is submitted without formal editing.

For the initial report submitted by the Government of Belarus, see CEDAW/C/5/Add.5, which was considered by the Committee at its second session. For the second periodic report submitted by the Government of Belarus, see CEDAW/C/13/Add.5, which was considered by the Committee at its eighth session. For the third periodic report submitted by the Government of Belarus, see CEDAW/C/BLR/3, which was considered by the Committee at its twenty-second session.

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Part III provides an overview of the progress achieved in advancing the status of women in the Republic, as well as remaining obstacles.

Part I

General information

A. Demographic situation

The current demography of Belarus is shaped by several negative factors acting in tandem, characterized by abrupt disturbances of an ecological, social and political nature that have resulted in a population decrease which began in the early 1990s and is still continuing. At the beginning of 2001, Belarus had a population of 9,990,400, which was equivalent to its 1986 population; over a total of 10 years, from 1990 to 2000, the population fell by 221,000.

Furthermore, since 1993, the death rate in Belarus has exceeded the birth rate, resulting in depopulation of urban as well as rural areas. The birth rate over this period fell by 39.8 per cent (13, 9.8, 8.8 and 9.4 per 1,000 persons in 1990, 1995, 1997 and 2000 respectively). The slight upturn in 1998-2000 was due to an increase in the number of women of the most active child-bearing age (20-29 years). More specifically, the birth rate reflects the overall reproduction rate of the population at a given time, providing an idea of the average number of children born to a woman over her entire lifetime, disaggregated by maternal age. In 1990, this figure stood at 1.91; in 2000: 1.31. It can be concluded that the birth rate in Belarus is insufficient to ensure population renewal.

The birth rate also depends considerably on the number of marriages and divorces. Over the last 10 years in Belarus, there has been a decrease in the number of registered marriages, with a 56.5 per cent drop in the marriage rate (from 9.7 to 6.2 per 1,000 persons in 1990 and 2000 respectively). Over the same period, the number of divorces rose by 26.3 per cent, from 3.4 to 4.3 per 1,000 persons in 1990 and 2000 respectively. There are considerably more divorced women in all age groups than men, since men more often remarry. Many marriages end due to the death of one of the spouses, also most often the man. According to the 1999 census, one in four women was divorced or widowed (27.5 per cent), compared to one in 10 men (10.2 per cent).

The decline in the country's birth rate can be explained by the reduction in the size of the fertile population, the ageing of the population, the decreased marriage rate and increased divorce rate, as well as a reduction in the birth rate as a result of female choice, frequently for reasons of an ecological nature, namely radiation phobia and fears concerning the possible impact on children's health of radioactive contamination of the territory.

The overall death rate over the past decade increased by 32.7 per cent (from 10.7 per cent in 1990 to 14.2 per cent in 2000). Two age groups have a particularly high mortality rate, namely:

– Newborns and babies under one year of age;

– Persons over 60 years of age.

A special infant mortality rate has been introduced for the first group. In Belarus, this rate has remained stable at 11 to 13 per 1,000, and has even shown a slight decrease in recent years (11.9, 13.3 and 9.3 per 1,000 in 1990, 1995 and 2000 respectively). The overall increase in mortality cab thus be explained by a worsening in the health of persons over 60 years of age. In addition, as the population has aged in recent years, younger people, particularly males, have tended to show increased mortality rates. Throughout the reporting period, there has been a higher mortality rate among men as compared to women. Thus, over the past decade, men's mortality rate increased by 33.8 percent (from 11.2 to 15 per 1,000 in 1990 and 2000 respectively), compared to 17.3 per cent for women (10.4 to 12.2 per 1,000).

These negative trends have had a significant impact, first, on general life expectancy, which fell from 71.1 years in 1990 to 67.9 years in 1999, although it rose slightly to 69 years in 2000; moreover, the decrease in life expectancy has been more noticeable for men, from 66.3 years in 1990 to 63.4 years in 2000; over the same period, women's life expectancy fell from 75.6 to 74.7 years. Second, these trends have only exacerbated the ageing of the population. In 1989 in Belarus, there was a total of 1,984,000 persons of retirement age, accounting for 19.5 per cent of the population. Already by 2001, that number had increased to 2,126,000 persons, or 21.3 per cent of the total population. Over the same period, the proportion of children fell from 24.5 to 19.9 per cent and the total number of children and adolescents under 16 years of age in the age pyramid decreased, while the size of the active population increased.

An analysis of the evolving age structure of the population reveals considerable disparities between urban and rural inhabitants. According to the 1999 census, there were 746 dependants per 1,000 active persons; however, while in rural areas that figure had increased to 1,170, it stood at only 607 in urban areas. In 1989, the corresponding figures were 786, 1,100 and 655.

In addition, over the past decade, the normal male-female balance, disrupted by the war, started to be redressed in the urban and rural population. There has been a progressive equalization of the population structure, with the necessary gender balance being achieved by 1994. According to the 1999 census, for every 1,000 men, there were 1,129 women including 1,123 in urban areas and 1,144 in rural areas, as compared with 1,131; 1,127; and 1,140 respectively at the beginning of 2000.

Over the reporting period, internal and external migration also became less pronounced. The balance of migration with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Baltic countries has remained positive. In Belarus, migration exchange occurs mainly with the Russian Federation, Ukraine and Kazakhstan, with citizens from those countries accounting for 90 per cent of new arrivals.

B. The social, economic and political status of women

Together with economic reform in Belarus, there has been a reappraisal of the place and role of women in society, in view of the emergence of new opportunities, and new problems, in their daily lives. On the one hand, there are ever-increasing opportunities for women to participate and fulfil their potential in employment and in political and public life. On the other hand, it is women who have borne the brunt

of the negative effects of the transition period: a disproportionately heavy burden of work both in the workplace and at home, poverty affecting female-headed households, unemployment and so forth.

The most acute problems are in the field of employment. Currently 2.27 million women, or 52.7 per cent of the total working population, are employed in various sectors of the economy. There is a clear preponderance of women in the non-manufacturing sectors (except in the sciences) and a slight increase in their participation in the service sectors (except for transport). Thus, in health, sports and social service institutions, 82.1 per cent of employees are women; in education: 78.7 per cent; culture and the arts: 53.1 per cent; trade and public catering: 73.7 per cent; communications enterprises: 64.8 per cent. Any redistribution of the workforce to the social sectors is impeded by lower wages compared to the manufacturing sectors, as well as lack of demand for certain services.

Thus, despite possessing a significantly higher level of education (48.7 per cent of women are qualified specialists compared to 32.8 per cent of men), women are increasingly employed in lower-paid occupational groups and sectors. In 2000, women's average wage in the national economy was 81 per cent that of men.

Female unemployment remains a serious problem. On 1 January 2002, there were 62,000 unemployed women registered in employment services, accounting for 60.3 per cent of the unemployed population. The most common explanation for female unemployment is staff reductions in enterprises and organizations (68.4 per cent of unemployed women registered). Only 29.6 per cent of unemployed women had chosen to resign, compared to the majority of unemployed men. Women with young children, female graduates with no work experience, women close to retirement age, disabled women and women in occupations which, because of competition in the labour market, are male-dominated (such as engineering, technology and construction) are in the most difficult situation in the labour market.

The priority areas of the employment policy throughout this period continued to be proactive measures such as helping the unemployed find jobs, increasing the territorial mobility of the workforce, providing occupational guidance and training, promoting entrepreneurial initiative and supporting the independent employment of unemployed citizens, creating new jobs and developing the system of public works. The State employment service, together with public prosecutors' offices continually monitors compliance with women's legislation. Particular attention in this regard is given to the registration in the employment service of pregnant women, women with children under three years of age, as well as single mothers with children from 3 to 14 years of age who have been dismissed by employers as a result of staff reductions.

The policy of equal rights and equal opportunities aims, inter alia, to ensure the equal participation of women and men in decision-making at all levels. Women in Belarus are currently underrepresented in the legislative and executive bodies; thus they are not full participants in the decision-making process, which has a crucial impact on public life and future generations. However, the situation is changing for the better. Indeed, the number of women deputies elected to the House of Representatives of the National Assembly more than doubled (from 4.5 to 10.3 per cent) following the 2000-2001 elections. Women's involvement in the work of local elected councils of deputies at all levels is gradually increasing, with women currently accounting for 37 per cent of all deputies. Moreover, the employment of

women in executive bodies has increased in both absolute and relative terms over the past five years, and this is true of virtually all ministries and State committees. In the local executive bodies, 22 per cent of deputy chairs of executive committees at various levels are women and on average across the regions, more than 30 per cent of administrative heads and more than 50 per cent of departmental heads are women.

Social welfare is a priority of State policy. It is generally recognized that the family is the natural mechanism for protecting its members, as well as a key social institution in which gender roles are recognized and put into practice. It is also in the State's interests not to undermine that mechanism, but to support and reinforce it, by creating conditions for the maximum and full realization by the family of its main functions, and to help strengthen its potential. The attainment of this goal depends to a significant extent on the status of women in society, their degree of participation in decision-making and their involvement in social development processes, as well as a reasonable distribution of roles within the family. This presupposes a rational combination of professional and family roles for all members of this crucial social unit.

Strengthening social protection for families, especially those with children, and enhancing financial support, remain a major priority for Belarus. State support for families with children takes the form of various types of benefits (including supplementary unemployment benefits), tax concessions, child nutrition, free pre-school attendance, textbooks, medicines, transportation, etc. Despite numerous difficulties, the number of institutions offering social services of one kind or another to families is constantly growing.

Since 1998, special attention has been accorded to the creation of a system of social services, which already comprises 23 social service centres for families and children, 26 training centres, 65 shelters for minors and 95 remedial/rehabilitation centres. Specialists from these institutions make home visits to families "at risk", assess the assistance needs of individual families and children, provide psychological, pedagogical and legal support to persons living in difficult circumstances, and give them advice on how to take care of themselves and how to claim benefits, compensation and other payments. However, despite the positive momentum in the development of the social services system, the population's needs in that regard have yet to be fully met. Further development of the necessary institutional network is thus essential.

The health of women and children is adversely affected not only by difficulties associated with the transition period, but also by the consequences of the Chernobyl accident. The Ministry of Health is undertaking a whole range of measures in that regard. First, regional programmes have been developed on reproductive health, family planning and reduction of maternal and infant mortality. Second, a multi-tiered system of perinatal care has been established for mothers and babies requiring intensive treatment or resuscitation, which is provided in major maternity centres to pregnant women with serious illnesses, women in childbirth and newborn babies. Third, maternity hospitals are gradually moving towards a rooming-in system for mothers and babies, and breastfeeding is widely advocated and supported. Increasingly, the gender dimension is being taken into account in safeguarding reproductive health, from joint childbirth preparation for mothers- and fathers-to-be to the creation of family-friendly maternity wards. Consequently, and thanks to a wide network of medical institutions, women's access to medical services in recent

years has not diminished. Moreover, through the establishment in women's health clinics of oncology and family-planning services and access to gynaecologists, endocrinologists and mammographers, new types of specialized care are becoming available to the population.

Furthermore, executive bodies, public organizations and the mass media have become more involved in promoting healthy lifestyles and advocating against smoking, alcohol abuse and narcotic drug use. Public awareness is growing of the deleterious impact of these phenomena on both the health and the overall social status of women, particularly young women.

An analysis of the results achieved shows that Belarus has, for the most, part, made progress in understanding and improving the situation of women, including by implementing a targeted, gender-sensitive social policy. In May 2001, the Government adopted its second national plan of action for gender equality for the period 2001-2005.

C. Institutional mechanism for the advancement of women

Implementation of State policy to eliminate gender inequality largely depends on national institutional capacity. This includes:

- The Commission on Social Issues of the Council of the Republic of the National Assembly;
- The Commission on Health, Sport, the Family and Youth of the House of Representatives;
- The Office of Social and Cultural Policy of the Council of Ministers;
- The Department for Family Policy and Gender Issues of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare.

Each of the above-mentioned structures within the national mechanism have their own responsibilities. While the House of Representatives of the National Assembly and the Council of the Republic deal with issues relating to the development of the legislative framework in the social sphere, including the situation of women, government and ministry specialists participate in developing and executing policy for the advancement of women, ensuring equal rights and equal opportunities for men and women and enhancing the legislative framework by incorporating a gender perspective. The main tasks entrusted to the Department for Family Policy and Gender Issues of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare are:

- Systematically monitoring the status of women;
- Participating in the preparation of national reports on the issue;
- Analysing the situation with regard to the implementation in Belarus of the relevant international conventions, treaties and agreements;
- Promoting gender awareness among the public and decision makers.

At the regional level, local labour and social welfare bodies execute State social policy. They help develop measures to ensure equal rights and opportunities for men and women and facilitate the progressive implementation of State policy in this field. In 2001, there were 121 specialists on family and gender issues working within regional

and district labour and social welfare bodies. Special attention is being accorded to upgrading the qualifications and knowledge of these specialists, by holding training seminars, publishing information brochures and so forth.

In May 2000, by government decision, a National Council on Gender Policy was established under the Council of Ministers. The creation of such a body with higher status and broader authority was made necessary by the need for interdepartmental coordination and analysis of gender issues at a higher level. A strategic goal of this national mechanism is advocacy for and implementation of the concept of gender equality.

Part II

Article-by-article review of the implementation of the provisions of the Convention

Article 2

The fourth, fifth and sixth periodic report of the Republic of Belarus on the implementation of the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women provides detailed information on the embodiment of the principle of the equality of women and men in the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus and other appropriate legislation.

All the basic human rights are incorporated in the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus of 1994 (as amended and supplemented by the national referendum of 24 November 1996). Thus, article 21 stipulates that "the State shall guarantee the rights and freedoms of the citizens of Belarus that are enshrined in the Constitution and the laws and specified in the State's international obligations". Article 22 establishes the principle of equality before the law; it states that all citizens "have the right, without any discrimination, to equal protection of their rights and lawful interests". The Republic's legislative enactments thus do not contain any provisions that discriminate against women.

In addition to the Constitution, the principle of equality is embodied in such legislative acts as the Marriage and Family Code, the Labour Code, the Criminal Code, the Civil Code and the Employment Act, among others. Thus, under article 14 of the Labour Code (which entered into force on 1 January 2000), "discrimination, that is the restriction of employment rights or the granting of any advantages on the basis of gender, race, ethnic origin, language, religious or political views, participation or non-participation in trade unions or other public associations, financial or official status, or physical or mental disabilities that do not hinder the performance of the work duties concerned, shall be prohibited ...

"There shall not be considered as discrimination any distinctions, exclusions, preferences or restrictions:

"(1) Based on requirements peculiar to the work in question; or

"(2) Necessitated by the State's special duty of care in respect of persons requiring enhanced social and legal protection. Such persons include women, minors, disabled persons and victims of the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, among others.

"Persons who believe that they have been subjected to discrimination in the area of labour relations shall have the right to apply to a court for the removal of the discrimination."

With regard to civil law rights and obligations, the equality of rights of citizens (women and men) with respect to relations regulated by civil law is enshrined in the Civil Code of the Republic of Belarus. Article 2 provides that "subjects of civil law participate in civil relations on an equal footing, are equal before the law, may not enjoy advantages or privileges that are at variance with the law and have the right, without any discrimination, to equal protection of their rights and lawful interests (principle of equality of persons participating in civil relations)".

In accordance with articles 16 and 20 of the Civil Code, women have the same legal and dispositive capacity as men, and the restrictions established by Belarus' legislation are not related to the sex of citizens. Thus, article 30 of the Civil Code stipulates, inter alia, that a citizen who puts his or her family in a difficult material position as a result of the abuse of alcohol, narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances may have his or her dispositive capacity restricted by a court, as provided in the law of civil procedure. In such case, he or she is placed under guardianship.

The law provides for the prosecution of violations of the equality of rights of citizens in the Republic. Thus, article 190 of the new Criminal Code (which entered into force on 1 January 2002) states that "the intentional direct or indirect violation or restriction of rights and freedoms and the establishment of direct or indirect advantages for citizens on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, language, origin, financial or official status, place of residence, attitude towards religion, beliefs, or membership of public associations resulting in substantial harm to the rights, freedoms and lawful interests of citizens shall be punishable by a fine, attachment of earnings for up to two years, restriction of liberty for the same period, or deprivation of liberty for up to two years, with or without deprivation of the right to hold certain posts or engage in certain activities".

The adoption of the new Marriage and Family Code of the Republic of Belarus has led to significant changes in the regulation of marriage and family relations. Until recently, such relations were governed by the Marriage and Family Code in force since 1969, but the establishment in the country of market relations called for corresponding reform of Belarus' legislation. For example, with the development of private ownership, it became necessary to introduce the institution of the marriage contract in order to protect the property rights of spouses. Issues such as common property and the joint responsibility of spouses for the maintenance and upbringing of children also required a modern interpretation. It was clear that the reformed legislation also had to incorporate provisions on the rights (including property rights) of children born in and out of wedlock and on the legal implications of unregistered or so-called common-law marriages.

The new Marriage and Family Code, which entered into force on 1 September 1999, set the following goals for legislation on marriage and the family:

- To model family relations on the voluntary marital union of a woman and a man, on equal rights for both spouses within the family and on mutual love, respect and mutual assistance among all family members;

- To establish the rights and duties of spouses, parents and other family members, in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus and the norms of international law;

- To protect motherhood and fatherhood and the lawful rights and interests of children, and to ensure favourable conditions for the development and growth of each child (art. 1 of the Marriage and Family Code).

The protection of marriage, the family, motherhood, fatherhood and childhood is recognized as one of the State's priority tasks (art. 3 of the Code). The State demonstrates its concern for the family by creating conditions for the economic independence and greater well-being of the family. These include a policy of reduced taxation, payment of State allowances to families with children, and preferential credit. The State is developing a network of child welfare and medical institutions and amenities, thereby giving parents the possibility of combining employment with the fulfilment of family responsibilities. At the same time, child-rearing and housekeeping are recognized as socially useful work.

The legal regulation of marital and family relations in the Republic of Belarus is the prerogative of the State. Only marriages contracted in State registry offices are recognized. Religious ceremonies relating to marital and family issues have no legal significance (art. 4 of the Code).

The minimum age of marriage for both women and men is fixed at 18 years (art. 18 of the Code). However, in certain cases:

- On the birth of a child to the couple, or where there is a certificate of registration of pregnancy,

- Where a minor is declared to have full dispositive capacity (emancipation), and

- Where the other conditions for contracting a marriage (as stipulated in art. 17 of the Code) are met, the State registry office may lower the minimum age of marriage established by law, but by not more than three years.

In accordance with the country's legislation, the right of women and men to legal protection of their interests in both civil and criminal matters is implemented on the basis of their equality before the law and the courts, irrespective of origin, social, official or financial status, race or ethnicity, political or other beliefs, gender, education, language, attitude towards religion, type or nature of occupation, place of residence, or other circumstances. This is established in article 6 of the Code of Civil Procedure and article 9 of the Code of Criminal Procedure of the Republic of Belarus.

However, the Criminal Code stipulates the following special provisions in respect of women:

- Women may not be sentenced to the death penalty (art. 59);

- A life sentence may not be imposed on them (art. 58);

- Pregnant women, and women and single men with children under 14 years of age or with disabled children may not be remanded in custody (art. 54);

- Commission of a crime by a pregnant woman is a circumstance mitigating criminal responsibility (art. 63);

- Commission of a crime against a woman known to the guilty party to be pregnant is a circumstance aggravating responsibility (art. 64).

The grounds for deferral of the serving of sentences by women are more humane compared with the previous norms. In accordance with article 369 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, the execution of a sentence whereby a person is condemned to deprivation of liberty, short-term imprisonment or attachment of earnings without deprivation of liberty may be deferred on one of the following grounds:

- The pregnancy of the convicted party at the time of execution of the sentence — for a period not exceeding one year;
- The convicted woman having young children — until the child attains three years of age.

In addition, the new Criminal Code broadens significantly the provisions stipulating criminal responsibility for offences against sexual inviolability or sexual freedom. In particular, responsibility is stipulated for the following offences:

- Rape (art. 166);
- Violent acts of a sexual nature (art. 167);
- Sexual intercourse and other acts of a sexual nature with a person who has not attained 16 years of age (art. 168);
- Sexual molestation (art. 169);
- Coercion into acts of a sexual nature (art. 170).

The new Criminal Code incorporates for the first time issues relating to the legal regulation of criminal procedure in cases involving the trafficking of Belarusian women abroad. Thus the Code stipulates criminal responsibility for traffic in persons (art. 181), kidnapping (art. 182), and offences involving the recruitment of persons for exploitation, first and foremost, sexual exploitation (art. 187).

Thus, a process of re-examination has been initiated with respect to the civil, labour, family and criminal legislation of the Republic that forms the legal basis for the realization of women's rights. The national legislative framework of the Republic of Belarus is being improved in line with the international legal norms and standards currently in force and taking into account the gender aspect.

Article 3

In accordance with article 32, paragraph 5, of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, "Women are guaranteed equal rights with men in their opportunities to receive education and vocational training, in employment and promotion at work, and in socio-political, cultural and other spheres of activity, as well as the creation of conditions for the protection of their labour and health".

Recognizing the significance of the gender problems that exist in society and guided by the resolutions of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995), the Government of the Republic of Belarus implemented from 1996 to 2000 a national plan of action to improve the situation of women and a national programme entitled "Women of the Republic of Belarus", and in May 2001, the Council of Ministers approved the national plan of action for gender equality for the period 2001-2005.

The implementation of State policy aimed at eliminating gender inequality depends to a great extent on the capacity of the national machinery. It comprises such structures of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus as the Commission on Social Issues of the Council of the Republic, the Commission on Health, Sport, the Family and Youth and the Commission on Labour, Social Welfare, Veterans and Disabled Persons of the House of Representatives, the terms of reference of which include issues relating to the development of the legislative framework in the social sphere, including the situation of women. There is an Office of Social and Cultural Policy within the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus.

The National Council on Gender Policy was established in May 2000 within the Council of Ministers to promote the development and implementation of gender policy in the Republic of Belarus. It consists of representatives of legislative and executive bodies and public associations, and academics.

There is a Department for Family Policy and Gender Issues within the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. The Department is a structural subdivision of the Ministry's Office of Social Assistance and Social Services and carries out its activities under the leadership of the Minister and the Deputy Minister. It is guided in its work by the Constitution and other laws of the Republic of Belarus, the decisions and decrees of the Council of Ministers, and the regulations and other normative acts of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare.

The main tasks of the Department are: participating in the development and implementation of State policy on the family and on gender; developing measures to create conditions for the fulfilment by the family of its functions and to improve the quality of life of the family; participating in the development of national machinery to ensure equal rights and opportunities for men and women; monitoring compliance with the legislation on State allowances and other social guarantees for families bringing up children; ensuring interdepartmental coordination and cooperation with national government bodies and public associations engaged in tackling the problems facing families, women and children; analysing the implementation in the Republic of the conventions of the United Nations and its structural subdivisions and of international treaties and agreements on issues relating to the social welfare of families and children and on gender issues; and participating in the preparation of national reports.

The staff of the Department for Family Policy and Gender Issues consists of four experts, including a head of Department, a consultant, and chief and lead experts.

The Centre for Gender Information and Policy, established in 1995 within the framework of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) project "Women in Development", remains operational within the Department. The Centre has been participating, since October 2001, in the implementation in the country of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) regional public awareness campaign "A life free of violence — it's our right", and since June 2002, in the implementation in the Republic of Belarus of a joint three-year project of the European Humanities University, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and UNDP entitled "Support to expanding public space for women in Belarus".

The development of a women's movement and the expansion of social partnerships between women's non-governmental organizations and government structures are having a positive impact on the enhancement of women's social status and the implementation of gender policy.

In future, women's non-governmental organizations must become an integral part of the national machinery for the advancement of women. Cooperation with women's non-governmental organizations is taking such forms as support for their initiatives in respect of the practical implementation of the national gender policy, conveying of their views to the Government, provision of various types of information (legal, analytical), consultancy services, organizational and financial support and so forth.

The Centre for Gender Information and Policy is playing an important role in strengthening the partnership between government structures and non-governmental organizations. The Centre is actively cooperating with the Belarusian Women's Alliance, the Young Women's Christian Association, the Women's Independent Democratic Movement, the Belarusian Organization of Working Women and the Belarusian Union of Social Workers. A most striking example of such cooperation was the participation of the Centre in the implementation by the Young Women's Christian Association from September 1998 of the mini project "Violence against women as a social problem". In September 1998, the Centre, in conjunction with the Belarusian Union of Social Teachers and Social Workers and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), led a round-table discussion of the draft act on social services and held an international seminar entitled "Experience of organizing social work in Poland". The strengthening of cooperation between non-governmental organizations and government structures has also been facilitated by the Centre's efforts to involve representatives of a range of public organizations in the development of draft legislative and normative acts and the expert analysis thereof and to enlist their participation in meetings with consultants from various international organizations.

Article 4

1. The national plan of action for gender equality for the period 2001-2005 was adopted with a view to reducing the disparity between the de jure and de facto situations of women in all spheres of activity and creating conditions for ensuring equal opportunities for persons of both sexes. The plan identifies the following priority areas:

1. Women and human rights;
2. Women and the economy. Social protection of women;
3. Women and education;
4. Women and health;
5. Participation of women in decision-making processes at the political, legislative and executive levels;
6. Women and violence;
7. Women and the mass media;
8. Development of institutional machinery for the advancement of women.

The following measures are envisaged in the first section of the plan:

- Examination of the issue of ratification of the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;
- Examination of the issue of possible ratification of International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 156 concerning Equal Opportunities and Equal Treatment for Men and Women Workers: Workers with Family Responsibilities, of 1981;
- Ratification of ILO Convention No. 183 concerning the revision of the Maternity Protection Convention (Revised), 1952, of 2000;
- Elaboration of a draft act on guarantees of equal rights and equal opportunities for men and women.

The plan also provides for gender analysis of legislative and normative acts and drafts thereof, monitoring of compliance with labour and employment law, and the adoption of measures to increase women's legal literacy.

Among the most important elements of the strategies for alleviating female unemployment, combating the feminization of poverty and expanding economic opportunities for women are the provision of self-employment training and the promotion of female entrepreneurship. It is precisely on these elements that the measures contained in the second section of the plan are focused. The development of women's entrepreneurial activity will be promoted through the creation of a favourable environment for them, including by establishing appropriate information, organizational and financial structures. In addition, it is proposed to provide women entrepreneurs with direct support through the development of microcredit programmes. This section also incorporates measures to increase the social protection of women.

The third section of the plan contains a set of measures for the revision of school curricula with a view to transforming existing gender stereotypes concerning the social roles of men and women in society. Under the plan, work on expanding gender education will continue.

Women's health care is an integral and important part of social policy on women. Appropriate measures, including the expansion of the range of services in the areas of family planning, sex education for young people and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, have therefore been incorporated in the national plan.

The policy of equal rights and equal opportunities for women and men presupposes, inter alia, equal participation by women and men in decision-making at all levels. With that in mind, the measures in the fifth section of the plan are aimed at widening women's participation in political, economic and social decision-making. The recently signed UNDP project "Expanding opportunities for women's influence in decision-making" will also help to address this task.

In addition, the plan contains a set of measures aimed at preventing and combating violence against women, including the enhancement of the collection of statistical information and the expansion of the range of social services provided for women victims of different forms of violence. A vital role in the implementation of

the plan has been assigned to the mass media, whose influence on public opinion and role in transforming existing gender stereotypes is difficult to overestimate.

2. In accordance with article 32 of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, "marriage, the family, motherhood, fatherhood and childhood are under the protection of the State".

The protection of marriage, the family, motherhood, fatherhood and childhood is also recognized as a priority task of the State under article 3 of the Marriage and Family Code.

Labour legislation, too, takes into account the fact that women are performing two social functions — professional and reproductive — simultaneously and, accordingly, provides special rights for women in connection with maternity.

Chapter 19 of the Labour Code stipulates special features with respect to the employment of two categories of workers: women workers and workers with family responsibilities.

The special provisions with respect to the employment of women are subdivided depending on who is concerned: all women; women working during pregnancy; women with children of the relevant age; and single mothers.

The term "workers with family responsibilities" used in the Labour Code corresponds fully to the terminology of international normative acts, including ILO Convention No. 156 concerning Equal Opportunities and Equal Treatment for Men and Women Workers: Workers with Family Responsibilities, of 1981.

It should be noted that chapter 19 of the Labour Code, "Special features with respect to the regulation of the employment of women and workers with family responsibilities", provides the following guarantees for women in connection with maternity:

- Prohibition or restriction of night work, overtime work and work on State or other holidays and on weekends, and of travel assignments for pregnant women and women with children under three years of age;
- Transfer to lighter work of pregnant women and women with children under 18 months of age;
- Granting of maternity leave;
- Breaks for breastfeeding;
- An additional day off work.

The Labour Code also establishes guarantees for pregnant women and women with children at the time of conclusion or termination of an employment contract. Under the provisions of article 268, the refusal to conclude an employment contract with a woman or the reduction of her earnings because of pregnancy or the existence of children under three years of age or, in the case of a single mother, the existence of a child under 14 years of age (or a disabled child under 18 years of age), is prohibited.

When refusing to conclude an employment contract with these categories of women, the employer is required to inform them in writing of the reasons for such refusal.

Refusal by an employer to conclude an employment contract may be appealed in a court of law.

The cancellation of an employment contract with a pregnant woman or a woman who has children under three years of age on the initiative of the employer is prohibited, except in cases of closure of the enterprise, institution or organization, or cessation of activity by the entrepreneur. The cancellation of an employment contract with a single mother who has children from 3 to 14 years of age (or disabled children up to 18 years of age) on the initiative of the employer is permitted in cases of closure of the enterprise, institution or organization, or cessation of activity by the entrepreneur, as well as on the grounds stipulated in other provisions of labour law.

In accordance with article 185 of the Labour Code, a woman may be granted leave on social grounds, irrespective of length of service and at her request, to care for a child until it reaches three years of age, with payment during this period of a monthly State allowance, the amount and conditions of payment of which are established by law.

The articles of the Labour Code governing the conditions for granting maternity leave and leave to care for a child under three years of age are directly aimed at protecting motherhood.

In conformity with article 184, "Maternity leave", "women shall be granted maternity leave for 70 calendar days preceding childbirth and 56 (in cases involving complications in childbirth or the birth of two or more children — 70) calendar days after childbirth, with payment during this period of a State social insurance allowance. Maternity leave shall be calculated cumulatively and shall be granted to a woman in its entirety, irrespective of the number of days actually taken prior to childbirth.

"Women working in the radioactively contaminated region shall be granted maternity leave for 90 calendar days preceding childbirth and 56 (in cases involving complications in childbirth or the birth of two or more children — 70) calendar days after childbirth. In addition, the total length of the leave may be not less than 146 (160) calendar days.

"The leave preceding childbirth referred to in paragraph 2 of this article shall, with the agreement of the woman, be granted outside the radioactively contaminated region if sanitary measures are being carried out."

The Health Care Act of 11 January 2002 categorizes measures for family planning and maternal, paternal and child health care as basic, accessible types of medical assistance (art. 20).

The national plan of action for gender equality for the period 2001-2005 also contains measures for the protection of maternal and reproductive health, including broadening the range of family-planning services, sex education for young people and preventing sexually transmitted diseases.

The new Code of Criminal Procedure, which entered into force as from 1 January 2001, includes additional special measures aimed at protecting motherhood for women serving sentences in correctional institutions. Article 95 of the Code defines special features with respect to the material provision for and daily routine of convicted pregnant women, nursing mothers and women with children. In

particular, this article stipulates that convicted women may place their children under three years of age in the nurseries of correctional facilities and visit them without restriction during time off from work. They may be permitted to live with their children in the nurseries.

Convicted pregnant women and nursing mothers may, depending on medical findings, receive additional food parcels in the amount and of the variety necessary for the maintenance of normal health by the mother and child (art. 95 90 of the Code).

Article 124, paragraph 4 of the Code broadened considerably the group of women who may not be kept on strict regimes in prison to include convicted pregnant women and women with young children. Previously, only convicted pregnant women and women with nursing infants enjoyed this privilege (art. 55 of the Correctional Labour Code of the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic).

Article 189 of the Code granted pregnant women and women with children under three years of age the possibility of deferring the serving of their sentences during the period when they may be exempt from work because of pregnancy and childbirth, or until the child reaches three years of age.

This provision broadened considerably the rights of convicted women.

Article 5

(a) Currently in Belarusian society economic reforms and a reassessment of spiritual values are being accompanied by a reappraisal of the role and place of women in society and a transformation of gender stereotypes. This is a complex process, however, because any initiative to promote gender equality and equal rights comes up against traditional, stereotyped concepts of the role of women as being confined to the family, while professional activities are widely considered to be unfeminine or anti-family. For women, work can only be an "occupation", not a "profession", let alone a "career".

At the same time, it must be recognized that the changes which are taking place have expanded women's opportunities for self-fulfilment and provided them with many opportunities for participation in employment and in political and public life. Women have become more entrepreneurial and have started to create jobs themselves. One phenomenon which is becoming typical of Belarusian society is a clash between the "traditional" model of women's behaviour rooted in stereotyped concepts of women's role and the ethos of individual achievement. The new experience of young Belarusian women will play a central role in the outcome of that clash. Typically, they believe in self-reliance, having successful careers, feeling a part of the wider world and pragmatism. They work with the Internet, master technical skills and undertake independent projects on equal terms. They take for granted the existence of equal rights and equal opportunities between men and women.

Perceptions of the role of men and women in society are formed during the process of the individual's socialization, under the influence of such social institutions as the school, the family and also political and government structures. The media play a significant role in shaping perceptions and views of women's place and role in society.

The situation of women is a matter dealt with to some degree or other in virtually all political, social, cultural and educational publications. Some newspapers and magazines devote features to this subject.

During the reporting period, the existing entertainment newspapers and magazines propagating images of seductresses, kept women and housewives have been joined by gender-related publications discussing questions of ensuring equal rights and opportunities between men and women in all areas of life, and readers are made aware that men and women can work in partnership. Such publications include the magazine "Another View", the bulletin "We are Women" of the Women's Independent Democratic Movement and the bulletins issued by various centres including the Gender Studies Centre of the European Humanities University.

The process of establishing a system of gender education continued during the reporting period, and courses on gender issues were introduced at the country's four higher educational institutions. A master's degree course in women's leadership, with specialization in management, was set up in 2002 under the auspices of the European Humanities University.

In accordance with the national plan of action for gender equality for the period 2001-2005, measures are being taken to review school curricula in order to tackle gender stereotypes with regard to the roles of men and women in society.

(b) A proper understanding of maternity as a social function and a responsible attitude towards parenthood and child-rearing are imparted under a course entitled "The individual, society and the State" taught over a total of about 20 hours in the eight and ninth grades of general educational institutions. For example, in the eighth grade, courses entitled "Spiritual values of the individual" and "My ego" emphasize responsible choice of spouse, and a course entitled "Our living bodies" includes discussion of family planning. The ninth grade curriculum includes a special topic "The individual's microenvironment", and a number of exercises are devoted to the study of motherhood and fatherhood, including the concepts of marriage, the family and parenthood.

The Ministry of Education has acknowledged the particularly topical significance of preparing young people for family life while they are still in senior classes at school. In a memorandum on instructional methods published in the summer of 2000, in time for the beginning of the academic year, it proposed to introduce for the tenth and eleventh grades a special course included in the teaching hours on "The individual and society". This special course was developed by the National Education Institute to fulfil the aim of establishing teaching methods which incorporate into the curriculum a course preparing young people for family life, part of the programme entitled "Children of Belarus" (subprogramme, "Development of social services for families and children"). The purpose of the special course is to give young people positive guidelines for making a sensible choice of spouse, founding a stable family and fulfilling family obligations responsibly in the future.

Article 6

The issue of traffic in persons and offences associated with this phenomenon did not emerge in Belarus until relatively recently. The measures taken by the Government of Belarus to reduce and prevent traffic in persons fall into four main categories:

1. Enhancement of legislation;

2. Establishment of special units within the law enforcement agencies to combat traffic in persons;

3. Information and awareness-raising work among young women planning to seek employment abroad;

4. Development of a system of social service institutions to provide assistance to potential and actual victims of this phenomenon.

The Criminal Code drafted in 1999 entered into force on 1 January 2001. When compared to the 1961 Criminal Code, the new Code introduces criminal responsibility for traffic in persons, including traffic for the purpose of sexual or other exploitation (art. 181: "Traffic in persons" of Chapter 22 "Crimes against personal freedom, honour and dignity"), which complies with the United Nations Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others and other international legal instruments which prohibit slavery, subjugation and all forms of traffic in persons.

Article 181, "Traffic in persons" of the Criminal Code, provides that:

1. "Action to buy, sell or conduct other transactions in relation to dependent persons by transferring or establishing ownership over them (traffic in persons) shall be punished by detention of up to six months, restriction of liberty of up to three years or deprivation of liberty for up to six years, with or without confiscation of assets.

2. The same acts, committed:

(1) In relation to an individual known to be a minor;

(2) In relation to two or more individuals;

(3) For the purposes of sexual or other exploitation;

(4) For the purpose of removing organs or tissues from the victim for transplantation;

(5) By a group of individuals acting in collusion, or by an organized group;

(6) By an official under cover of official functions,

shall be punished by deprivation of liberty for a period of between 5 and 10 years, with or without confiscation of assets".

3. If the acts described in paragraphs 1 and 2 of this article result by neglect in the death of a victim or serious physical harm to a victim, such acts shall be punished by deprivation of liberty for a period of between 8 and 15 years, with or without confiscation of assets.

Under article 12 of the Criminal Code, the acts described in article 181, paragraphs 1 and 2, of that Criminal Code are classified as serious criminal offences, and the acts described in article 181, paragraph 3 are classified as extremely serious criminal offences.

In accordance with article 10 of the Criminal Code "The commission of an act prohibited by this Code, in the form of:

(1) An actual crime;

(2) Preparations to commit a crime;

(3) An attempted crime;

(4) Complicity in a crime,

shall give rise to criminal responsibility." These provisions of the Criminal Code are fully applicable to traffic in persons.

Article 187 of the new Criminal Code establishes criminal responsibility for recruiting individuals in order to exploit them. Accordingly, paragraph 1 of that article stipulates the following punishment for recruiting individuals by means of deception for sexual or other forms of exploitation:

- a fine;
- exclusion from certain official positions or from certain types of work;
- detention for up to six months;
- restriction of liberty for up to three years;
- deprivation of liberty for up to three years.

Where carried out by a group of individuals acting in collusion, or against an individual known to be a minor, such acts shall be punished by restriction of liberty for a period of between two and five years, or deprivation of liberty for the same period (art. 187, paragraph 2 of the Criminal Code). Where an act envisaged in paragraphs 1 or 2 of article 187 is perpetrated by an organized group or with a view to transporting the victim out of the country, it shall be punished by deprivation of liberty for a period of between three and five years, with or without confiscation of assets (art. 187, paragraph 3 of the Criminal Code).

A directorate dealing with vice and illicit drug trafficking was set up within the Ministry of Internal Affairs in June 2000. Its functions include tracking down individuals engaged in prostitution and also individuals engaged in transporting prostitutes abroad, procurement or keeping brothels. The current crime situation has led to a gradual increase in the size of that directorate, which now has a staff of 30.

The 2001-2003 State Programme to intensify crime control (hereinafter referred to as the "State Programme") was approved by presidential decree No. 266 of 15 May 2001.

The State Programme was developed on the basis of an analysis of the crime situation and forecast of trends in crime in Belarus, the results of scientific research and the experience of fighting crime, including the most dangerous forms of crime. It takes account of the 2000-2003 Inter-State programme of Joint Measures to Combat Crime approved by a decision of the CIS Council of Heads of State of 25 January 2000, and the programme of action of the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation to implement the Treaty on the establishment of a Union State of 8 December 1999. Examples of the measures contained in the Programme are:

1. Continuation of work to establish in the regions and in Minsk local social service centres for families and children, educational and psychological support centres for the public, crisis centres for women and children who have been victims of violence, and telephone helplines (para.12);

2. Implementation, under separately agreed plans, of interdepartmental operational and preventive measures and special operations aimed at:

- detecting, preventing and halting illegal business deals involving the sexual exploitation of women and children, and the activities of producers and disseminators of pornography (para. 16, subpara. 16.5);
- conducting comprehensive scientific research into protecting the rights of crime victims: scientific and practical aspects of dealing with the issue (para. 27);
- continuing the practice of regular coverage in the media of the activities of the law enforcement agencies to combat crime and protect the public and public rights and freedoms from criminal harm (para. 34).

The Council of Ministers has also approved a 2002-2007 national programme of comprehensive measures to prevent traffic in persons and prostitution (by decision No. 1636 of the Council of Ministers of Belarus, of 8 November 2001). The working group which developed the State Programme included a representative of the Young Women's Christian Association of Belarus.

The fundamental aims of the Programme are to counter the increase in traffic in persons and prostitution, and to find methods of preventing and ultimately halting those negative phenomena.

With the aim of preventing illegal traffic in persons, an active information and awareness-raising effort is under way as part of the Programme. There are regular articles in the press about actual instances of traffic in persons, especially traffic in women, which have resulted in criminal prosecution. The press also carries advice on how to reduce the risk of falling victim to traffickers. In particular, newspapers carry regular warnings to the public to check that agencies arranging employment abroad are licensed.

The issues are also dealt with in the audio-visual media, which has aired specially commissioned programmes. In May 2000, national television broadcast a talk show with the participation of Government specialists and representatives of women's non-governmental organizations and show business. Minsk television showed a series of programmes.

In describing measures to prevent traffic in women, mention should be made of the cooperation between State bodies and public associations.

Through the combined efforts of the Centre for Gender Information and Policy, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and women's public associations, over the past three years a number of measures have been carried out on a regular basis such as the publication of information booklets and lectures to women's forums, consultations and seminars, including a seminar on "The issue of traffic in women in Belarus: the current situation and the prospects for a solution".

In November 2001, at the initiative of the Centre for Gender Information and Policy and the Young Women's Christian Association of Belarus, a brochure was issued entitled "Traffic in persons: fabrication or reality?", which had been produced and published with financial support from the office of the United Nations Department of Public Information in Belarus. It provided an overview of domestic and international law on traffic in persons, information on all agencies licensed to

arrange employment abroad and public organizations inside and outside the country which help victims of trafficking, and also practical advice for women seeking jobs abroad.

Over the past two years, the Young Women's Christian Association of Belarus, in cooperation with "La Strada", the Polish fund to combat traffic in women, has been implementing the "Adriana" project. Under that project, a helpline for women has been operating in Minsk since January 2001.

Since 2002, the Young Women's Christian Association of Belarus has been implementing a programme entitled: "La Strada Belarus 2002-2004: Prevention of Traffic in Women in Central and Eastern Europe" with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands (MATRA programme).

The migration department of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare permanently monitors the activities of all commercial agencies which assist Belarusians seeking work abroad. In 2001, the licences of seven such agencies were revoked. Information on agencies violating legislation on employment abroad is passed to the law enforcement agencies for appropriate action to be taken. There is also continuous monitoring of advertisements for employment abroad appearing in the media.

Funding is currently being sought from the International Organization for Migration and UNDP for the implementation in Belarus of two projects dealing with the prevention of traffic in persons.

By signing the concluding documents of the Beijing Conference, Belarus committed itself to detecting and addressing the problems of violence against women. Some progress has already been made in that regard.

In order to broaden existing information on the problem of violence against women, a number of sociological research projects have been carried out over the past seven years. With the support of the Centre for Gender Information and Policy of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and UNIFEM, the Young Women's Christian Association of Belarus carried out a research project in 1998-1999, entitled "Violence against women as a social problem". In 2000, the Women's Independent Democratic Movement published a handbook entitled "Violence against women: problems and solutions".

Under the "Children of Belarus" programme and the national plan of action for gender equality for the period 2001-2005, work has been conducted over the past five years to establish crisis centres for women. Some assistance for women victims of violence is now available through a number of social service centres for families and children.

Such centres are also being set up through the efforts of public associations. In 1998, a crisis centre for women victims of sexual and domestic violence was opened in Minsk under the aegis of the Belarusian Women's Alliance. Since 1998, the women's educational and advisory centre has been providing psychological and legal advice to women victims of violence (Women's Independent Democratic Movement).

The Belarusian Union of Social Workers is currently working to establish a further crisis centre in Minsk as part of a project financed by the TACIS (technical assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States) programme.

Since the autumn of 2001, in order to step up efforts to resolve the problem of violence, Belarus, along with other CIS countries including Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and also Lithuania, has been implementing a regional project forming part of the information campaign entitled "A Life Free of Violence" funded by UNIFEM.

The fundamental aim of the campaign is to help increase public awareness of the problem of violence against women as a crime and a violation of human rights, and promote acknowledgement of its root causes and economic and social consequences. The campaign's main focus is domestic violence, with a secondary focus on sexual harassment in the workplace.

In order to implement the project in Belarus, a national working group was set up, consisting of representatives of the National Assembly (parliament), government bodies, public associations, the media and the faculty of higher educational institutions.

As part of the "A Life Free of Violence" campaign, an event entitled "Sixteen days of activism to combat violence against women" was held from 25 November to 11 December 2001 in Belarus.

A round-table meeting entitled "Belarus and the realization of women's right to a life without violence" was timed to coincide with the start of the event on 29 November 2001. It was organized by Centre for Gender Information and Policy of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, the Young Women's Christian Association of Belarus and the Women's Independent Democratic Movement, with the organizational support of the office of the United Nations and the United Nations Department of Public Information in Belarus; 53 representatives of government bodies, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs and representatives of public associations, the media and social workers participated in its work.

The main aim of the round table was to consolidate the efforts of everyone involved in activities to prevent domestic violence and tackle its consequences. Discussion covered the legal aspects of ensuring women's right to a life without violence, the possibility of widening the range of social services provided by social service agencies to women and children who fall victim to domestic violence, and the activities of women's public associations and the media to raise society's awareness of the issue.

A video feature on the round table was shown on national television news, and a programme on the round table compiled by Internews was shown by 18 regional television stations.

Calendars for 2002 (in a print run of 8,000) and two booklets (in print runs of several thousand) were produced to coincide with the "Sixteen days of activism to combat violence against women"; they provided practical advice for women at risk of domestic violence and information on the addresses and telephone numbers of social service centres providing psychological and legal assistance.

As part of the activities of the Young Women's Christian Association of Belarus, two telephone helplines were set up with the assistance of a legal expert and two psychologists. Information on the work of the experts was disseminated through posters in metro carriages. During 16 days, 43 women received telephone counselling, primarily of a legal nature.

In the course of carrying out a project to assess the level of public awareness of domestic violence and sexual harassment in the workplace, a survey was also conducted among 90 residents of Belarus.

Belarus, demonstrating the priority our State places on the promotion and protection of human rights, has deposited instruments for its participation in the following:

- International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children, opened for signature in Geneva from 30 September 1921 to 31 March 1922;
- International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women of Full Age, signed in Geneva on 11 October 1933;
- Convention on the Political Rights of Women;
- Convention for the Suppression of Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others;
- Final Protocol to the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others;
- Slavery Convention, signed in Geneva on 25 September 1926, with the Protocol amending it of 7 December 1953;
- Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices similar to Slavery;
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;
- Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography;
- Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction.

The Republic of Belarus has signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Inter-Country Adoption, and the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its additional Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.

In addition, steps are being taken to permit Belarus to become a party to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its additional Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.

Cooperation between the law enforcement agencies of the Republic of Belarus and the law enforcement agencies of other States in combating the aforementioned

crimes is taking place on the basis of the following bilateral international agreements:

- Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Belarus and the Government of the Republic of Turkey on cooperation in combating international organized crime, international trade in illicit narcotics and international terrorism (signed at Ankara on 24 July 1996);
- Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Belarus and the Government of the State of Israel on cooperation in combating crime (signed at Jerusalem on 4 February 1997);
- Agreement between the Ministries of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus and of the Republic of Bulgaria on cooperation in combating crime (signed at Sofia on 13 September 1994);
- Agreement between the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Romania on cooperation in combating crime (signed at Bucharest on 22 May 1996);
- Agreement between the Ministries of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus and the Republic of Poland, represented by the Ministers for Internal Affairs, on cooperation in combating crime (signed at Warsaw on 24 April 1994);
- Agreement on cooperation between the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania (signed at Vilnius on 16 July 1993);
- Agreement on cooperation between the Ministries of Social Security of the Republic of Belarus and of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam (signed at Minsk on 23 October 2000);
- Agreement on cooperation between the Ministries of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus and of the Peoples' Republic of China (signed at Beijing on 23 April 2001).

With the aim of expanding the legal framework for international cooperation to combat traffic in persons, the Belarus Ministry of Internal Affairs is currently preparing the necessary documentation to conclude international treaties on measures to combat traffic in persons with the Governments of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of India, the Republic of Poland, the Arab Republic of Egypt and the Republic of Estonia.

The legal framework for cooperation between the law enforcement agencies of the States members of CIS consists of the following international agreements:

- Inter-State Programme of Joint Measures to Combat Crime for the period from 2000 to 2003 (approved by a decision of the CIS Council of Heads of State of 25 January 2000);
- Agreement on cooperation among the States members of CIS in combating crime (signed at Moscow on 25 November 1998);
- Agreement on joint action by the Ministries of Internal Affairs of the Commonwealth of Independent States in the area of combating crime (signed at Almaty in 1992);

- Agreement on relations among the Ministries of Internal Affairs in the area of exchange of information (signed at Cholpon-Ata on 3 August 1992);
- Agreement on cooperation between the Ministries of Internal Affairs on questions of the return of minors to their State of residence (signed at Volgograd on 24 September 1993).

In addition, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus has concluded bilateral interdepartmental cooperation agreements with the Ministries of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, Turkmenistan, Moldova, Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan.

For the purposes of implementing these international conventions, a series of protocols have been concluded which regulate the basic areas of cooperation and provide for various forms of cooperation between the internal affairs bodies of the Republic of Belarus and those of the Russian Federation, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and the Republic of Armenia.

In implementation of the decision of the Council of Heads of Government of CIS of 25 November 1998, a programme of inter-State measures to combat crime was drawn up for the period from 2000 to 2003, which provides for a set of measures and joint actions intended to increase the effectiveness of the cooperation among the States members of CIS in combating international organized crime in its various manifestations.

In implementation of section VI (Monitoring mechanism), paragraph 6.1 of the Programme, the Ministry of Internal Affairs developed a plan of action to implement the Inter-State Programme of Joint Measures to Combat Crime for the period from 2000 to 2003, which was approved by presidential order No. 219 of 7 July 2000.

The Plan governs legal issues, and information, scientific, material-technical, financial and human resources, and also contains a set of practical measures and establishes a monitoring mechanism for their implementation.

The practical measures envisaged in that Plan include in particular the obligation of the law enforcement agencies of Belarus to conduct interdepartmental operational and preventive measures and special operations to expose and halt criminal activity involving abduction and traffic in persons, human organs and tissue for transplantation.

In furtherance of that Plan and in fulfilment of obligations placed on the internal affairs bodies, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, in its area of competence, designed and approved a Plan for the implementation of the Inter-State Programme of Joint Measures to Combat Crime for the period from 2000-2003.

Within the framework of the Union State, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, together with the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation, have devised a draft inter-State programme to combat crime in the territory of the member States of the Union State for the period 2001-2003.

Over the past six years the number of crimes reported involving operation of brothels, prostitution, procurement, and living off the proceeds of prostitution, has increased 4.7 times. In 1996, 42 vice crimes were reported, 62 in 1997, 62 in 1998, 89 in 1999, 149 in 2000 and 197 in 2001.

In the first seven months of 2002, officials of the internal affairs bodies reported 251 crimes, nine of which were related to traffic in persons, one abduction, 11 cases of recruitment of persons for sexual exploitation, 197 cases of operating a brothel for prostitution and procurement, 13 cases of distribution of pornographic materials or articles, 34 cases of inciting minors to engage in antisocial behaviour, and out of that number, 19 cases of introducing them to prostitution.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Belarus has established and continuously updates a database on vice crimes and offences, and also the individuals who have committed them.

In order to prevent crimes against women and to eliminate the reasons for such crimes, the responsible units of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the corresponding Ministries of the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Lithuania, Poland, Austria, Germany and Spain have exchanged information on the perpetrators of such crimes.

On 4 April 2001 a file was opened on the investigation of members of an international criminal group made up of citizens of Belarus, Germany and member States of CIS. Over the 1997-2001 period, members of this criminal group recruited women and sent them to Germany, Austria, Italy, Spain and other countries of Western Europe to work as prostitutes. Efforts to expose this criminal group of over 15 people were conducted in close cooperation with the German Federal Department of Investigation in Berlin through the liaison officers for that department in the German Embassy in Belarus. In the course of the investigation 16 members of the criminal group were arrested; 42 prostitutes were temporarily detained; assets of about 200,000 German marks were confiscated; and real estate built with the proceeds from this criminal activity was seized.

Advertisements for paid sexual services disseminated over the Internet are systematically investigated.

Article 7

(a) In accordance with article 38 of the Constitution, citizens of Belarus have the right freely to elect and be elected to State bodies on the basis of general, equal, direct and indirect suffrage under a secret ballot. These provisions are also found in the Electoral Code of the Republic of Belarus (arts. 3 to 7).

The Constitution of Belarus guarantees equal rights for men and women to free association and to take part in decisions on State affairs directly or through their freely elected representatives. Direct participation of citizens in managing the affairs of society and the State is ensured through referendums, discussions on draft laws and issues of national and local significance, and by other means provided for by the law. Under the procedure established by law, citizens of Belarus take part in the discussion of issues affecting the State and society in the national and local assemblies (arts. 36 and 37 of the Constitution).

In accordance with their capabilities and professional training, citizens have the right to equal access to any offices in State bodies (art. 39 of the Constitution). Citizens of Belarus, irrespective of their social or financial status, racial or ethnic origin, gender, religious affiliation or political views have the right to serve in the public administration, in accordance with article 7 of the Act on "The principles of service in public administration".

(b) An important criterion for the achievement of true gender equality is parity in women's and men's participation in decision-making at all levels.

Despite the good preconditions — high educational status, a long history of legally guaranteed political rights, access to practically all types and disciplines of higher education, mass involvement in the economy and mastery of new professions and types of activity, resulting in high levels of professional achievement — behavioural stereotypes are very slow to change among women themselves. They still do not connect professional advancement with their own individual efforts, and therefore they cannot fully enjoy their political rights, and they lack experience with competitive races for seats as deputies in the elected bodies of the legislature.

The current situation of women's participation in administration reflects the realities of their position in society both from the point of view of the insufficient development of their leadership qualities and motivation to hold leadership posts, from that of public awareness and existing stereotypes, including the persistence of a traditional attitude to women's role in society.

At the same time, as a result of the 2000-2001 elections, the number of women deputies in the House of Representatives of the National Assembly more than doubled (from 4.5 per cent to 10.3 per cent). In the Council of the Republic the proportion of women senators remained at the previous level.

There is a gradual change for the better in the situation with regard to the participation of women in local elected councils of deputies. In the spring of 1999, 8,827 women were elected to local councils of deputies at all levels, representing 37 per cent of the total.

Executive power in the Republic is exercised by the Government of the Council of Ministers — which is the central body of State governance. There are two women in the Council of Ministers: the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare and the Minister of Health. Women represent 29.4 per cent of the staff of the Council, and a woman holds the post of head of administration.

An analysis of the employment of women in the ministries points to broader participation of women in shaping and implementing policy. In practically every ministry in recent years the employment of women has increased both in absolute terms and proportionately. Currently, in the great majority of ministries the proportion of women exceeds 50 per cent. As for the rest, excluding those having to do with law enforcement (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Ministry of Defence) the proportion of women ranges from 30 to 50 per cent. The highest proportion of women, in descending order, are found in the following: Ministry of Statistics and Analysis (90 per cent women), Justice (73.1 per cent), Trade (71.3 per cent) and Finance (68.9 per cent).

As for decision-making posts below the ministerial level, or with direct influence on decisions, such as deputy minister, head of administration, head of department and senior specialist, there were 10 women deputy ministers in 2001. Women are increasingly holding senior specialist, department head or head administrator posts.

The area where women in the Republic have been least able to realize their potential as skilled administrators and mediators is the diplomatic service. Women represent around 20 per cent of staff in the foreign offices of the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs; four women represent the Republic in the international arena with the rank of ambassador.

Judicial power in the Republic is exercised through a system of courts which is built on the principles of territoriality and specialization. Women are quite broadly represented in the bodies of the judicial branch; 46.4 per cent of judges are women. Women are even better represented in the legal profession as lawyers (62.9 per cent) and notaries (women account for 93.4 per cent of State notaries). An analysis of the statistical data on the employment of women in the Supreme Court confirms this. In 1990, there were only three women on the Supreme Court (13.6 per cent); in 1998, their share had grown to 27 per cent. Currently, 5 out of the 11 members of the Constitutional Court are women.

The level of participation of women in administration is an important criterion for the achievement of true gender equality, and this is a slow and difficult process. Therefore, Government intervention is needed, as well as mass public activities and single-minded efforts to destroy the stereotypes which have developed both in society as a whole and among women themselves.

The Constitution of the Republic of Belarus guarantees equally to women and men the right to freedom of association. Article 36 of the Constitution reads, "Everyone has the right to free association". A similar provision is contained in article 2 of the Act on public associations: "Citizens of the Republic of Belarus have the right on their own initiative to form public associations and to join existing public associations".

Recently, civil society has experienced intensive processes of self-organization, self-regulation and combined efforts by non-governmental organizations to achieve maximum results.

Twenty national women's organizations registered with the Ministry of Justice are currently operating in Belarus. About the same number of women's organizations are registered at the local level — at the regional, municipal and district levels. However, there are substantial variations in the number of members, potential and degree of autonomy of non-governmental organizations.

The first women's organizations emerged out of the general democratic movement at the beginning of the 1990s. Among the first organizations registered with the Ministry of Justice were the Belarusian Women's Alliance, the Women's League of Belarus (discontinued its activities in 1992), the Organization of the Mothers of Soldiers of the Republic of Belarus, and the Women's Independent Democratic Movement. After 1995, the country experienced growth in the number of women's organizations: organizations were established within trade unions, the formation of women's groups within political parties continued, and a number of women's organizations emerged as part of the corresponding international bodies.

The Belarusian women's movement "Za adradzhenne aichyny" (Renaissance) arose within the Belarusian Popular Front, the "All-Belarusian Women's League" brought together women with socio-democratic views, the "League of Women Voters" consists mainly of members of the United Citizen's Party, and the Women's Liberal Association operates out of the Liberal-Democratic Party. The Belarusian Organization of Working Women is a free association of trade unions. The women's professional organizations "Tatyana" (1991), the Association of Women Jurists

(1997) and the women's non-governmental institute ENVILA are also active in Belarus.

As a whole women's public associations make up less than 3 per cent of civil society organizations. However, a number of public associations which are not specifically for women have active women's groups working on their own projects. From 1996-2001, the Women's Independent Democratic Movement monitored the women's movement in Belarus, resulting in the publication of the directory "Women's non-governmental organizations of Belarus".

Belarusian women's public associations have completed their establishment phase, and each of them is engaged in a number of specific projects aimed at solving some of the problems which women face in daily life. Among issues of concern to women's organizations are raising the status of women in society, broadening their participation in decision-making at all levels, developing women's entrepreneurship, problems of violence against women, especially domestic violence, and also traffic in persons, especially women and children. Many organizations give priority to providing social assistance to women and increasing their legal literacy. Some organizations have established their own structures offering social services on an ongoing basis. In 1998, through the efforts of the Women's Independent Democratic Movement, the Women's Educational Advisory Centre was opened, which provides educational and practical advisory services. The Belarusian Women's Alliance operates a centre for social support, along with a crisis centre. The Belarusian Organization of Working Women supports a number of regional centres to provide legal assistance. The Gender Studies Centre of the European Humanities University engages in research and educational activities. Many public associations cooperate closely with foreign women's organizations and have successfully sought funding to carry out their projects. However, it is still too early to speak of the women's movement as a mass movement with influence on political decision-making. There are both objective and subjective reasons limiting its development. Despite the recognition of the need to expand the social partnership between State structures and non-governmental organizations in the implementation of social policy, the lack of special legislation on social needs hinders this process, limiting the possibility of participation by non-governmental organizations in the realization of the most significant State social programmes. Nevertheless, examples of successful cooperation of government bodies and public associations are becoming more frequent. For example, the preparation of the National plan of action for gender equality for the period 2001-2005 was carried out in close cooperation with women's non-governmental organizations.

Article 8

The legislation of the Republic of Belarus does not contain any discriminatory provisions affecting the right of women to represent the Government of the Republic of Belarus and the State at the international level.

The legislation and regulations on recruitment to diplomatic and other work in the central apparatus of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its offices abroad, and also on the promotion and rotation of staff, are based on the principle that equal demands are made on all staff, regardless of their gender.

Article 9

1. The Citizenship Act of 18 October 1991, with subsequent amendments and additions, which regulates the procedure for acquiring, changing or retaining nationality, does not make any distinction among subjects of law in this area on the basis of gender. The subject of the act is defined by the terms "citizen of the Republic of Belarus" or "person".

Article 3 of the act, entitled "Equal citizenship", provides that citizenship of the Republic of Belarus is equal for all citizens, regardless of the grounds on which it was acquired. The following are citizens of the Republic of Belarus:

1. Persons who reside permanently in the territory of the Republic of Belarus on the date of the entry into force of this act; and
2. Persons who have acquired citizenship of the Republic of Belarus in accordance with this act (art. 2).

Article 4 of the act, entitled "Right to citizenship", provides that a citizen of the Republic of Belarus may not be deprived of citizenship or of the right to change citizenship. The conclusion or dissolution of a marriage between a citizen of the Republic of Belarus and a citizen of another State or a stateless person does not change the citizenship of the husband or the wife (art. 14). The residence of a citizen of the Republic of Belarus in the territory of another State does not of itself lead to loss of citizenship of the Republic of Belarus (art. 15).

2. The act grants women equal rights with men with respect to the nationality of the children. It provides for the expression of wishes by both parents, without giving preference to either of them, at the time of determination, change, acquisition or confirmation of the citizenship of a child (arts. 10, 22 and 24-27).

Citizenship of the Republic of Belarus is acquired by birth and as a result of the granting of such citizenship (art. 8). A person may be granted citizenship of the Republic of Belarus if he/she:

1. Undertakes the obligation to observe and respect the Constitution and the laws of the Republic of Belarus;
2. Knows the official language of the Republic of Belarus to the extent necessary for communication;
3. Has resided permanently in the territory of the Republic of Belarus for the past seven years;
4. Has a legitimate source of income;
5. Does not hold citizenship of another State (art. 13).

Article 10 of the act establishes the conditions for determining the citizenship of a child born outside the territory of the Republic of Belarus if the father is not a citizen of the Republic of Belarus. If at the time of the child's birth one of the parents was a citizen of the Republic of Belarus, the child is a citizen of the Republic of Belarus if:

1. He/she was born in the territory of the Republic of Belarus;

2. He/she was born outside the Republic of Belarus, but the parents or one of the parents was residing permanently in the territory of the Republic of Belarus at that time.

If at the time of the child's birth outside the Republic of Belarus, the parents, one of whom is a citizen of the Republic of Belarus, were residing permanently outside the Republic of Belarus, the citizenship of such a child is determined by written decision of the parents.

If at the time of a child's birth, one of the parents was unknown or stateless and the other parent was a citizen of the Republic of Belarus, the child is a citizen of the Republic of Belarus regardless of the place of birth (art. 10).

Article 10

(a) The educational system of the Republic of Belarus is non-discriminatory in nature. In accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus and the Educational Act, women are guaranteed, and ensured in practice, equal opportunities with men in access to education and vocational training, continuing education and non-formal education. The law provides that every one has the right to education, and guarantees universal access to freed general secondary and vocational/technical education and, on a competitive basis, secondary specialized and higher education. Foreign nationals and stateless persons residing permanently in the Republic of Belarus have the same rights to education as citizens of the Republic of Belarus, unless otherwise provided by the laws and international treaties of the Republic of Belarus.

The right of citizens to education is ensured by: the development of a network of education institutions, the existence of various forms of education and types of educational institutions, the creation of socio-economic conditions which make it possible to obtain education, free of charge, in State educational institutions, partial or full financing from national and/or local budgets of the living expenses of students who need social assistance for the duration of their studies, the availability of education taking into account ethnic traditions, and also the individual requirements, abilities and needs of students, the provision of work-study opportunities, and access to education and social adaptation for persons with mental and physical handicaps.

The legislation of the Republic of Belarus guarantees access to education regardless of race, ethnic origin, language, gender, age, state of health, social, financial or official status, social origin, place of residence, attitude to religion, beliefs and party affiliation.

(b) Girls and boys living in urban and rural areas, at all levels of education, study under the same curricula and receive the same educational diplomas. This equality is ensured through a system of State educational standards which has been established in the Republic of Belarus for all levels of education.

Girls and boys, women and men have the same conditions for career and vocational guidance. Every year the Ministry of Education issues special handbooks for students entering vocational and technical institutions, students entering secondary specialized educational institutions, and students entering higher educational institutions. These handbooks contain full information about conditions

of acceptance, occupations and specialized fields in individual educational institutions.

Students of both sexes are educated together in the educational institutions of the Republic of Belarus. They use the same textbooks, educational aids and equipment, and are taught the same subjects by teachers with equal qualifications, using identical teaching methods and means of instruction. Boys and girls sit for the same examinations under the same curricula and study under equal conditions.

There are no restrictions on women's access to education in specific fields of specialization or occupations — unless, of course, there are medical contraindications. There are restrictions only in individual occupations included in the list of heavy jobs and jobs with dangerous working conditions in which the employment of women is prohibited (mainly in the chemical, oil processing and mining industries and in the energy sector and construction). The list of such jobs, after being duly researched, is approved by the Government.

Women now have access to training in specialized fields and occupations which were previously the exclusive preserve of men. An example is the admission of women to faculties preparing skilled personnel for diplomatic work, and also to the traditionally male educational institutions of the armed forces and bodies of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The legislative and regulatory instruments of the Republic of Belarus provide for equal opportunities for women and men to receive scholarships, financial support and other study grants.

Women have equal rights with men to refresher training and retraining. The availability of continuing education enables women of any age to upgrade their qualifications or obtain retraining, and this includes specialized fields which are in demand in the labour market, for example, economics and management. Every year over 500,000 people study in the refresher training system, and over 40 per cent are women.

The legislation on physical education and sports, education and the basic principles of youth policy guarantee and ensure equal rights and opportunities for girls and boys, women and men, in the area of physical education and sports.

As a result of curriculum reforms in the educational system, practical and applied knowledge has been significantly expanded with a view to preparing young people for a full life in society. This also includes information on health and healthy lifestyles, preparation for family life, family planning and reproductive health. To this end, optional and special courses and elective courses are organized at various levels of education and thematic information and awareness-raising activities are carried out.

The educational level of women in the Republic of Belarus is higher than that of men; this has been the case for a long time, and is confirmed by the basic trends in the development of the educational system.

In recent years there have been structural and qualitative changes in the educational system which are fully in line with international educational processes, reflect the changes and prospects in the Republic, and take into account the basic provisions of the international instruments to which the Republic of Belarus has acceded in the areas of population, non-discrimination against women, non-

violence, human rights and the rights of the child. This also applies both to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and to the implementation of the Committee's recommendations on the third periodic report of the Republic of Belarus. State policy in the area of education aims to ensure equal access to education, achievement of the principle of social justice in access to education, and enhancement of its quality.

The educational system of the Republic of Belarus comprises 9,357 pre-school, primary, basic, general secondary and vocational-technical institutions, 150 secondary specialized educational and 55 higher educational institutions, and 377 institutions for refresher training and retraining of specialists, as shown in the table below.

Type of educational institution	*At the beginning of the academic year*	*All students*	*Including girls and women*	*%*	*Remarks*
General education schools and State-owned boarding schools (total)	1995-1996	1 540 840	768 140	49.85	nationwide
	2001-2002	1 445 585	716 764	49.58	total
of which preparatory and 1st-3rd (4th) grades — primary school	1995-1996	622 337	303 153	48.71	"
	2001-2002	503 431	243 810	48.43	
of which (4th) 5th-9th grades — basic school	1995-1996	769 889	378 993	49.23	"
	2001-2002	759 834	370 427	48.75	
of which 10th-12th grades — secondary school	1995-1996	148 614	85 994	57.86	"
	2001-2002	182 320	102 527	86.23	
Secondary specialized educational institutions	1995-1996	121 560	53 587	44.8	State
	2001-2002	155 352	88 184	56.76	(nationwide)
Higher educational institutions	1995-1996	174 189	90 471	51.94	"
	2001-2002	301 753	172 005	57.00	

The reforms of the educational system initiated and supported by the State apply fully to all levels and aspects and are aimed at improving the quality of knowledge, developing the creative and moral/intellectual potential of the nation, inculcating among students humanistic ideals, independence, and the willingness and skills to live in a dynamically changing multipolar world, and training highly skilled and competitive specialists. The changes which are taking place take into account the interests and needs of girls and women in the area of education and ensure them equal opportunities from the start in personal growth and self-fulfilment.

The first level of the national educational system is pre-school education, the goal of which is to develop the personality of the child, foster his or her individuality and physical and intellectual growth, and protect and implement his or her rights. Conditions have been created in Belarus for universal access to pre-school education, which is the fundamental prerequisite for the exercise of the right to appropriate education. While in 1994, 58.5 per cent of children, including 35.8 per cent in rural areas, attended pre-school institutions, in 2000, the number of children rose to 70.8 per cent, including 46.1 per cent in rural areas. In 2000 there were 4,423 pre-school institutions, with 390,800 pupils. Almost every second family receives services from pre-school institutions. The tuition fees for children in pre-school institutions amount to less than 30 per cent of the cost of meals. In order to

provide social support for families with children, the law provides for allowances to cover the costs of pre-school institutions for needy families, families with many children or with mentally or physically handicapped children, families living in areas of radioactive contamination, and also families living in rural settlements in areas subject to periodic radiation monitoring. In order to meet the needs of society and families in respect of the education of children under six years of age, various types of institutions have been developed in the pre-school system, including institutions with intensive instruction and flexible work schedules. Of the total number of institutions at this educational level, 354 are school-kindergarten complexes, 20 are child development centres, 21 have intensive instruction, 48 are therapeutic centres, 39 are remedial and 737 are a combination. This variety in the area of pre-school education is best suited to the needs of families and the interests of children and allows for improvement of the quality of the services provided.

The transition to a general education school for children over six years of age requires preparation of all five-year-olds for entry into school. In 2000, 87,700 five-year-olds, of both sexes, were receiving pre-school education, or 85.7 per cent of the total. School preparation for all five-year-olds is feasible within the next few years. Thus, regardless of gender, social situation or income level of the parents, children are ensured equal starting opportunities when entering school.

Universal secondary education consists of three levels and comprises primary education (at age four), basic education (at age nine) and secondary education (at age 11-12). The objective is to ensure intellectual and physical development, prepare the younger generation for a full life in the community, educate citizens of the Republic of Belarus, instil in them the foundations of science, national languages, and mental and physical work habits, and inculcate moral values, culture, an aesthetic sense and a healthy lifestyle.

Virtually all children in urban and rural areas who have reached school age enter primary school, and then basic school.

In the 2001/02 academic year, there were 503,000 children, including 243,600 girls, or 48.4 per cent, at the primary level (preparatory, first to third grades). When urban and rural areas are separated, these figures are as follows: urban areas — 367,800 children, including 178,300 girls, or 48.5 per cent; rural areas, 135,200 children and 65,200 girls, or 48.3 per cent. At the basic level of general education school (fourth to ninth grades), there are 759,300 students, including 370,200 girls, or 48.8 per cent. In urban areas, there are 562,800 students, including 275,000 girls, or 48.9 per cent, and in rural areas, 196,800 students, including 95,000 girls, or 48.4 per cent.

Altogether there are 4,631 general education day schools (1,465,769 students), including 632 primary schools (18,982 students), 996 basic schools (67,407 students), 2,774 secondary schools (1,264,098 students), 100 grammar schools (81,795 students), 25 high schools (11,235 students), six grammar school-colleges (2,065 students), and 98 schools for children with mental and physical handicaps (20,184 students). There are also 12 non-State-owned general education schools with an enrolment of 1,025 students.

A transition is under way to a 12-year instruction cycle starting at the age of six. In the current academic year, 102,700 children have been admitted to preparatory classes, including 85,300 six-year-olds; in urban areas — 88,100 and

68,900 respectively, and in rural areas — 28,800 and 25,600. For this category of children, the optimal educational conditions have been established. Most preparatory classes are located at pre-school institutions (58.1 per cent of the total number of students).

The variety of general education institutions, including grammar schools, high schools, colleges and the non-State sector, offer an opportunity to receive in-depth and specialized education, and the choice of the most appropriate option for families and children.

The reforms and the establishment of a system of education centred on the individual have substantially changed approaches to meeting the needs of each child in order to create optimal conditions for fulfilling their educational needs. The fulfilment of this principle has led to the introduction of new models of special education and a search for new ways of delivering services to children with mental or physical handicaps. A national special education system is being established. Its goal is to ensure access to education at all levels for children with mental or physical handicaps, depending on their abilities, and to find positive forms of integration in society. At the general education schools, the number of integrated classes for teaching children with special developmental needs has been increased, as has the number of children in this category studying in vocational/technical, secondary specialized and higher educational institutions. Remedial education centres are a new means of delivering services to children with developmental difficulties and their families. This is a type of institution which provides comprehensive remedial/educational and socio-educational assistance to disabled children in the home. At the centres, education is organized for children with severe, multiple handicaps, who were previously considered uneducable and remained outside the educational system. Currently, in the regions of Belarus, there are 95 remedial education centres, 3,706 integrated education classes for 7,577 children, 412 special classes (4,547 children) and 822 school centres for remedial and educational help (28,820 children).

Vocational and technical education in the Republic of Belarus is accessible, free of charge and flexible, and preserves social benefits for students. There are 248 vocational and technical institutions, with 135,800 students, including 50,200 girls, or 36.9 per cent. Beginning in the second half of the 1990s, there was an increase in the number of students admitted to vocational and technical institutions, from 55,200 in 1995 to 60,000 in 2001, and out of the total number of accepted students, 40 per cent were girls, which was 3 per cent higher than in the previous year. The vocational and technical education system is highly mobile and flexible and is being developed in the light of the needs of the labour market and the implementation of programmes for the reduction of unemployment, including women's unemployment. The vocational and technical institutions offer training in 350 occupations, 77 per cent of which are integrated and combined. Currently over 60 per cent of vocational and technical institutions operate as multidisciplinary educational institutions, training workers and specialists in a variety of areas for various sectors of the economy. Every year training is conducted in educational institutions in 20-30 integrated occupations, taking into account the expanded opportunities for obtaining an occupation available to girls, including those living in rural areas. For example, girls studying for the occupation "farm manager" generally study three of the seven occupations offered: fruit and vegetable gardening, milking machine operator, operator of livestock complexes and farms, laboratory assistant for chemical and

bacteriological analysis, cook, seamstress, and sales clerk. Such graduates have a broader range of job opportunities. A procedure has been established and is being put into practice for converting vocational and technical institutions into higher vocational and technical educational institutions, vocational high schools and vocational/technical colleges, in which conditions have been established for obtaining secondary specialized education. In 19 vocational and technical colleges and 18 higher vocational and technical institutions there are about 12,000 female students. In recent years, in the vocational and technical institutions, training has been made available for specialized workers in new occupations in which women predominate, such as basketry and wicker-work, computer operators, and secretaries/editors. In 20 educational institutions, secretaries/typists with various specialized skills are receiving training.

In the 1996/97 academic year, training was introduced for skilled workers in such occupational spheres as entrepreneurship, insurance, and social work. Workers, mainly girls, are being trained as entrepreneurs, insurance agents and social workers. Entrepreneurial training is also provided to students as a supplement to training in the main occupation, which enables graduates to engage in individual entrepreneurial activity.

Over 120 vocational and technical institutions provide vocational training for the unemployed, including women. Of that total, 31 institutions provide training and retraining for occupations in communal services, trade and public catering.

Girls with physical and mental handicaps, including disabled girls, may study in vocational and technical institutions of the Republic in 30 occupations in 28 schools (15 per cent of the total number of schools). At the Mogilev economic vocational and technical college and the Bobruisk college, centres have been established for the vocational and social rehabilitation of disabled girls and children with mental and physical handicaps, where children, including girls, not only receive vocational and technical education, but also benefit from medical treatment and social rehabilitation.

The new list of educational fields and qualifications, which has been drawn up with a view to ensuring a more inclusive list of individual occupations, envisages broader opportunities for women to obtain vocational and technical education.

The network of secondary specialized educational institutions has been maintained. While in 1994 there were 145 secondary specialized educational institutions, in 2001, there were 150. They have 155,300 students, of whom 56 per cent are girls. In addition, there are eight secondary specialized educational institutions which are not State-owned, in which there are 6,767 students. In the secondary specialized educational institutions, the system of vocational training for unemployed women has been expanded in new, fast-growing occupations with the help of the employment fund: marketing, management, accounting, banking activities, the tax system, basic principles of law, entrepreneurial activity, small business, environmental protection and the rational use of natural resources.

The most dynamic growth rates in recent years have been in higher education. The contingent of students at State higher educational institutions increased from 173,800 in 1994 to 301,700 in 2001, including students in educational institutions with extrabudgetary sources of financing.

In Belarus there are 301 students per 10,000 members of the population, which is the best indicator in the country's history, comparable with the figures for the economically most developed countries of Europe; this demonstrates the transition to universal higher education. In the higher educational institutions there are 17,000 girls, or 57 per cent of the total.

The higher educational institutions have been converted into universities and academies. Of 44 State higher educational institutions, 24 are universities, 9 are academies, 5 are institutes, 5 are advanced colleges, and one is an advanced school. There are 14 higher educational institutions and 9 affiliates which are not State-owned, with 41,700 students.

The characteristics of professors and teaching staff in higher educational institutions under the direct control of the Ministry of Education, taking into account the gender approach, are shown in the following table.

	At year's end	*Total*	*Of which, women*	*%*
Number of professors/teaching staff	1995	10 775	4 702	44
	2001	13 826	7 395	53
Including: rectors and pro-rectors in scientific and technical work	1995	87		
	2001	119	9	7
Deans	1995	165		
	2001	237	56	23
Heads of department	1995	744		
	2001	889	230	26
Departmental professors	1995	480		
	2001	627	118	19

The gender-disaggregated distribution of students in higher educational institutions according to fields of specialization is provided in the following table.

2001/02

Field	*All students*	*Women*	*%*
Military-engineering	4 692	21	0.45
Humanities	41 217	26 525	64.35
Medicine	9 806	6 983	71.21
Natural history and science	11 968	6 401	53.48
Education	51 565	38 242	74.16
Agriculture	16 180	5 206	32.18
Technology	60 134	17 232	28.66
Economics	64 431	46 532	72.22

Belarus is setting up a system for the study of human rights, including women's rights, and also gender education.

In 1998, a special course "Human Rights" was introduced in general-education schools, vocational-technical schools and secondary specialized and higher educational institutions, which included women's rights as set forth in international instruments. In higher educational institutions, the "Human Rights" course is conducted for 18 to 40 hours, depending on the field and specialization.

The "Human Rights" Academic Methodological Laboratory and its Centre for Information and Training in the Field of Human Rights and Civil Education have been functioning since 1995 at the State University National Institute of Higher Education.

The National Institute of Higher Education, the National Institute of Vocational Education and the Academy of Postgraduate Education organize specific courses, "Rights of the Child — Human Rights", "Human Rights", "Civil Education", "The Individual and Society", and "Gender Education: Traditions and General Status", for teachers at higher educational institutions, secondary specialized and vocational training institutions, and general-education schools, in which 236 education specialists have participated over the past two years.

Various aspects of training and education in the field of human rights and gender problems have been incorporated into the content of courses for the further training and retraining of teachers in social-science disciplines, the basis of social and humanitarian disciplines, and social and political sciences and also of social-science instructors, whose functions include providing information on human rights, the rights of the child, women's rights, gender education and consultation among children and young people. More than 220 such specialists received training in 2001-2002. Courses on gender problems have been included in the curricula of the Byelorusian State University, the ENVILA Women's Non-State College, the European Humanities University and others.

Further training and retraining of personnel are carried out at 377 education training institutions (subdivisions). The training of working personnel is organized also directly in enterprises. Each year, more than 500,000 persons, of whom more than 40 per cent are women managers and specialists, receive instruction in the system for further training.

In 2002, expenditures for education were allotted at the rate of 6.9 per cent of the gross domestic product, representing an increase of 0.2 per cent over the 2001 level.

The following are among the basic positive trends in the education system that make it possible to enhance the quality of education, including that of girls:

- Reform of general-education schools (transition to a 12-year instruction cycle, start of instruction at 6 years of age, a 5-day school week, and a 10-grade marking system), making it possible to humanize education, minimize psychological stress and maintain the health of students;
- Maintenance and rationalization of the network of pre-school educational institutions, general-education schools, and vocational-training, secondary specialized and higher educational institutions; development of new types of educational establishments (development centres, grammar schools, lycées, colleges, etc.) and various forms of ownership; and a flexible work schedule, particularly for pre-school institutions, enabling parents and children to select

them with account taken of their requirements and enhancing the quality of educational services;

- Availability and continuity of various levels of education, maintaining social functions aimed at supporting and protecting pupils and students in difficult living situations, developing a system for educating children with psychological development problems and providing social and teaching assistance and support to the needy;
- Changing the content of education and its functional and practical orientation, enabling students to prepare for life in society and determine their future on the basis of their own resources;
- Consolidation of efforts to review education problems taking into account gender-based approaches.

Gender-disaggregated data on teaching personnel in general-education schools are provided in the following table.

Data from all ministries:

As at 1 October 2001	*Overall number*	*Number of women*	*Percentage*
All teachers and school administrators	136 350	113 300	83.1
Including:			
Primary school principals	300	390	96.7
Basic school principals	1 060	560	52.8
Secondary school principals	3 000	1 470	49.0
Basic school assistant principals	900	800	88.9
Secondary school assistant principals	4 800	4 400	91.7
Teachers (not including school administrators)			
1-4 and preparatory years	30 900	30 600	99.0
5-11 (12) years	68 300	59 300	86.8
Music and singing, fine arts	24 750	13 750	55.5
Drawing, physical education and work training			

During the 2000-2001 academic year, from 5 September 2000 to 5 September 2001, 755 persons prematurely withdrew from school. Of this number, five children (two in a town and three in a village) did not complete primary school, 327 pupils (173 and 154 respectively) left secondary classes and 423 senior pupils (258 and 165 respectively) left school. We would again note that gender-based statistics are only starting to be introduced in the calculation systems of the corresponding services and, therefore, the requested gender disaggregation has not been given in the figures provided.

Increased attention is currently being focused in the Republic of Belarus to developing a system for protecting families' reproductive health, providing families with the possibility to use at their discretion the necessary information on family planning, and also disseminating up-to-date information on the culture of reproductive behaviour.

Thus, article 20 of the Health Care Act, in the version of 11 January 2002, categorizes measures for family planning and maternal, paternal and child health care as basic, accessible types of medical assistance.

Articles 33, 34 and 35 of the Act regulate assisted reproduction, sterilization and induced abortion.

Work on family planning and the provision of contraceptive services is conducted primarily by doctors and midwife-gynaecologists in women's clinics. In accordance with Ministry of Health order No. 212 of 22 June 1998 "on measures to strengthen reproductive health", there are family planning offices in most women's clinics. The Health Centre at the Second Municipal Gynaecological Hospital in Minsk provides women with highly qualified medical and consultative assistance, including with regard to family planning.

The National Plan of Action for Gender Equality for the period 2002-2005 also contains measures for protecting reproductive health, including broadening the range of family planning services, sex education for young people, and preventing sexually transmitted diseases. A number of measures are designed to encourage responsible behaviour by men with regard to reproductive and sexual health. In particular, there are plans to carry out the programme "Partnership in Childbirth": from the joint childbirth preparation for fathers- and mothers-to-be to the creation of family-friendly maternity wards. The section also contains measures aimed at broadening health-care services for women throughout their lives.

The Office of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in the Republic of Belarus plays a major role in carrying out measures to ensure the reproductive rights of men and women, including the provision of modern contraceptive devices.

Women's non-governmental organizations are making a definite contribution to providing more information on family planning to the population. In 2002, the Women's Independent Democratic Movement carried out a sociological research study entitled "Reproductive behaviour of the population of the Republic of Belarus (2002)". The compendium "The Demographic Situation and Reproductive Rights in Belarus" deals with its results.

The international public philanthropic organization "Nadezhda-Ekspress", in cooperation with the United States humanitarian organization "City Hope International", is carrying out in Belarus a number of programmes for maternal and child protection and prevention of violence against women. Within the framework of the project "Belarusian Madonna-XXI Century", four information centres were established providing the population with access to foreign and domestic information on the protection of reproductive rights, the foundations of the family, and a healthy lifestyle. A telephone and postal hotline has been opened, and consultations with legal experts and psychologists are being conducted.

Article 11

1. Under the Constitution, women and men in the Republic of Belarus have, in accordance with their capabilities and occupational training, the right of equal access to any posts in State bodies (article 39), the right to choose a profession, type of occupation and work in accordance with their vocation, capabilities, education, occupational training and with account taken of societal requirements, and also the right to healthy and safe working conditions (article 41), the right to equal

remuneration for equal work (article 42), the right to health care, the right to an education (article 49), and the right to social security in old age (art. 47).

Labour relations regarding women are governed by the Labour Code, which entered into force on 1 January 2000. Under article 11 of the Code, both women and men have the following basic rights as workers:

1. Work is the most dignified means of self-affirmation, which means the right to choose a profession, type of occupation and work in accordance with one's vocation, capabilities, education, occupational training and with account taken of societal requirements, and also the right to healthy and safe working conditions;

2. Protection of economic and social rights and interests, including the right to form trade unions, conclude collective contracts and agreements, and the right to strike;

3. Participation at meetings;

4. Participation in the management of organizations;

5. Guaranteed and fair remuneration for labour in accordance with its quantity, quality and social significance, but not lower than a level that ensures workers and their families a free and dignified life;

6. Daily and weekly rest, including weekend days during State or other holidays and leave, the length of which is no shorter than that established under the Code;

7. Social insurance, pension security and guarantees in cases involving occupational diseases, industrial accidents, disability and loss of work;

8. Non-interference in one's personal life and respect for personal dignity;

9. Judicial and other protection of labour rights.

In chapter 19 of the Labour Code, on "the specific details of regulating work by women and workers with family obligations", the following areas relating to the labour rights of women are regulated:

- Work where women's labour is prohibited;
- The prohibition or restriction of night work, overtime work, and work on State or other holidays and on weekends and of travel assignments for pregnant women and women with children under three years of age;
- Assignment to night work, overtime work, and work on State or other holidays and weekends and of travel assignments for women with children from 3 to 14 years of age (disabled children up to 18 years of age) only with their consent;
- The transfer to lighter work of pregnant women and women with children under 18 months of age;
- Granting of maternity leave;
- Breaks for breastfeeding;
- An additional day off work.

The State creates conditions for the full employment of the population by drawing up and carrying out a policy to achieve complete and productive

employment and ensure proper economic and social protection of the population against unemployment and a transition to targeted social support for socially vulnerable population groups. State regulation of the labour market is designed to prevent the growth of unemployment to a level threatening to result in social upheaval.

The mechanism for regulating the labour market in Belarus has been developed on the basis of the Employment Act, which defines the following basic principles of the State employment policy:

- Ensuring equal opportunities for all citizens of the Republic able to work in implementation of the right to work;
- Providing social guarantees and unemployment compensation;
- Taking measures aimed at preventing unemployment;
- Taking additional measures to promote the employment of citizens with limited ability to work;
- Providing social protection in the field of employment, and carrying out special measures to find jobs for citizens wishing to work.

The most acute problems relating to the status of women are in the field of employment. Female unemployment continues to be a serious problem.

At the beginning of 2002, 102,900 persons, of whom 62,000 were women (60.3 per cent) were registered in employment services as unemployed.

Women predominate in all age groups of registered unemployed persons. The past five years have witnessed a trend whereby their number has tended to increase in the younger and older age groups and correspondingly decrease in intermediate age groups. Women 20 to 34 years of age — 33,200 persons or 47.9 per cent — are most frequently unemployed. The average age of a Belarusian unemployed woman is 30.7 years.

Under the conditions of competition in the labour market and the increased demand on the part of employers with regard to the quality of the labour force, the lower educational level of unemployed persons that has been noted to a large extent impedes efforts to solve the problem of placing them in jobs. On the one hand, most employers prefer workers who are highly qualified (not lower than categories 4 or 5) and have work experience; on the other hand, the labour market sector monitored by the employment service is increasingly being filled by lowly qualified workers. This trend was characteristic for both unemployed women as well as men.

At the same time, compared to men, registered unemployed women have a higher level of education: 25.6 per cent have a higher and secondary specialized educatio.., 62.9 per cent have a secondary general education, and 11.5 per cent have an incomplete secondary education. Among men, 16.8 per cent have a higher and secondary specialized education, 64.5 per cent have a secondary general education, and 18.7 per cent have an incomplete secondary education.

Women constituted 46.1 per cent of those persons recently registered as unemployed, 75.7 per cent of those dismissed owing to staff reductions, but only 31.2 per cent of those released at their own request.

The gap between the professionally qualified structure of unemployed persons and the vacancy structure has more distinctly negative consequences for women than for men.

Women experience more serious problems with job placement. This is reflected both in the average periods for finding a job and in the number of those who have been seeking work for at least one year. Whereas unemployed men found new work rather quickly — in 2.2 months, the period for women was 4.4 months.

As a result, women have a longer period of unemployment — 6.9 months as compared to 5.6 months for men. Women make up 80 per cent of unemployed persons registered for more than one year. The longer search for work is one of the aspects of the vulnerable position of women in the labour market.

The priority areas of the employment policy have remained all these years proactive measures such as helping the unemployed find jobs, developing territorial mobility on the part of the workforce, providing occupational guidance and training, promoting entrepreneurial initiative and supporting the independent employment of unemployed citizens, creating new jobs and developing the system of public works, reserving (setting quotas for) jobs in functioning enterprises and organizations in order to find employment for citizens who are unable to compete on an equal footing in the labour market (job placement of disabled persons, young people, women with children and others), ensuring the social protection of the unemployed population and so forth. These measures are being implemented under annual State and regional employment programmes. A number of measures are characterized by a rather substantial gender component.

The practice of setting job quotas is widely used in Belarus in order to find employment for underprotected categories of citizens, primarily single women with many children and women bringing up minors and disabled children.

Employment centres conduct "Job Fairs", "Fairs for Specialists", and "Open Doors at Enterprises" everywhere in order to assist women in actively seeking work and acquaint them with the labour market situation and trends affecting its development.

The level of funding from the State fund to promote employment earmarked to create jobs primarily for women has increased each year.

The most effective measure for mitigating the social effects of unemployment is to provide vocational training to unemployed women for occupations that are in demand on the labour market, including those enabling them to engage in independent employment. After they have received the training, the job-placement indicator of women rises considerably. Work has been stepped up on organizing vocational training for women with guaranteed job placement.

The new list of teaching specialties drawn up on the basis of a deeper and broader integration of individual occupations in the current unified handbook on rates and qualifications provides for expanding the possibilities of providing women with vocational training. The number of vocational training schools providing training to workers, mainly women, in such occupations as entrepreneurs, insurance agents and social workers has increased. There are 18 training institutions in the system of secondary specialized education that reorientate women towards occupations that are traditionally considered women's occupations: the accounting

and economics field, entrepreneurial activity, and the fields of trade, public catering, medicine, culture, service and national crafts.

Training is provided on a flexible schedule for unemployed women with under age children and also women who combine vocational training with correspondence and evening instruction.

The employment centres continually provide unemployed women with vocational reorientation services and social and psychological support in order to adapt them to the conditions of the changing labour market.

Self-employment and entrepreneurship are among the most important areas in strategies aimed at lessening the problem of women's unemployment, combating destitution and poverty and expanding women's economic opportunities.

In order to develop such forms of employment, the new "regulations on providing assistance through the State employment service agencies to unemployed persons in organizing and further developing entrepreneurial activities" were approved in 2000. The regulations provide for an increase in the size of the unemployment loans and compensation payments disbursed and extend the periods for providing loans. In addition, the procedure and conditions were laid down for providing unemployed persons who have organized their own businesses through the participation of funds from the State Employment Assistance Fund with further financial support from the State employment service for a period of two years after registration as individual entrepreneurs.

In accordance with the State employment programme, financial assistance was provided in 2000 in organizing entrepreneurial activities to 585 women (57 per cent of the overall number who received loans and subsidies) under the State employment programme. In 2000, the Belarusian financial support fund for entrepreneurship provided 35 per cent of its funds to small enterprises headed by women.

An entrepreneurship support and development infrastructure is gradually being set up, and approximately 25 per cent of the infrastructure entities are headed by women.

The basic types of women's entrepreneurial activities are sewing, knitting, wholesale purchasing, and providing domestic services (hairdressing, medical and cosmetic massage, clothing repair etc.).

The organization of temporary employment in the form of paid public work, which enables persons without work and the unemployed population to supplement their income and maintain or renew useful work habits, has been further developed. In 2000, employment centres concluded 6,147 contracts with economic entities for paid public work, which made it possible to provide temporary employment to 120,800 persons.

The basic objective of the State employment policy in the long term should be: rationalizing the employment structure by improving the quality of jobs and enhancing the competitiveness of manpower potential and effective incentives for highly productive work.

The State Labour Inspectorate, together with public prosecutors offices, continuously monitors compliance with women's labour and employment

legislation. Particular attention in this regard is given to the registration in the employment service of pregnant women, women with children under three years of age and also single mothers with children from 3 to 14 years of age who have been dismissed by employers as a result of staff reductions.

In carrying out women's employment strategies in coordination with the strategies to combat poverty, special emphasis must be placed on expanding women's economic opportunities, which should provide for:

- New approaches to developing entrepreneurial activities, including the creation of a favourable environment for women entrepreneurs and providing access to non-traditional financing sources, first of all, microcredit;
- Assisting women in expanding opportunities for obtaining a stable means of subsistence, including facilitating their access to professional training, more up-to-date technologies and corresponding information, and land and other natural resources.

The women's employment situation in unfavourable working conditions remains complex. A total of 420,700 persons (or 25.7 per cent of all persons employed in production) work in conditions which do not meet sanitary and hygienic norms. This figure includes 132,400 women (or 31.9 per cent of the overall number of persons employed in jobs which do not meet such norms). In the various branches of the economy, however, the employment of women in harmful production conditions varies and depends on the distribution of women's labour according to branches. To date, the proportion of women working in harmful conditions in industry is 31 per cent, in the chemical and petrochemical industries — 41.1 per cent, in light industry — 68.1 per cent, in the leather, fur and footwear industries — 57.2 per cent, in the chemical-pharmaceutical industry — 69.4 per cent, in the printing industry — 57.8 per cent and so forth. The most widespread harmful production factors affecting women at work include increased noise levels and a high dust and gas content (from harmful chemical substances) in the air in the work area.

Of course, harmful production factors do not have a favourable effect on women's health: the number of occupational diseases and morbidity with temporary incapacity for work are tending to rise. The indicators for morbidity with temporary loss of capacity for work is 18 to 20 per cent higher among women than among men of the same age working in the same conditions.

Some progress has been made in tackling this problem. In implementation of decision No. 90 of the Belarusian State Labour Commission of 29 July 1994 "on the list of difficult jobs and jobs with harmful working conditions where women's labour is prohibited", women have begun to be released from difficult and harmful work at enterprises in a number of branches of the economy.

Ministry of Labour Decree No. 111 of 8 December 1997 "on standards governing the manual lifting and transport of loads by women" is designed to ensure healthy and safe working conditions for women employed in enterprises and organizations, irrespective of form of ownership. It stipulates that as of 1 January 1998 the project documents for new construction and renovation projects must incorporate the new maximum permissible norms. This same decree also provides for the complete mechanization during 1998-2003 of all work carried out by women.

The Republic of Belarus possesses a full system of benefits and compensation for persons employed in harmful occupations, including women. This includes, in particular, preferential (early) retirement pensions, supplementary leave, reduced work hours, and diet and preventive nutrition.

Approximately 50 per cent of women working in jobs with harmful conditions are eligible for early retirement pensions.

The State Labour Inspectorate, together with public prosecutors' offices, continuously monitors compliance with the labour and employment legislation and fulfilment of safety and hygiene requirements in respect of work carried out by women. Measures are taken based on the results of such inspections, including appropriate penalties against employers and officials.

Women's working conditions, injury and sickness rates are subject to scrutiny as part of the monitoring of the social and labour sphere carried out by the "Working conditions and labour protection" unit. Proposals to improve working conditions and reduce injury and sickness rates among workers are made on the basis of the results of such monitoring. A new system for recording temporary loss of capacity for work, industrial injuries and occupational diseases has been adopted for the purpose of conducting situation analyses and devising measures required to prevent industrial injuries and occupational diseases among women.

Parity of salaries is important to the realization of equal rights and the creation of equal opportunities for men and women. Pursuant to article 42 of the current Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, "Women and men, adults and minors have the right to equal pay for work of equal value". In addition, equal pay for equal hours, difficulty and intensity of work is guaranteed to men and women by the Labour Code and several other legislative and regulatory acts.

Nationwide, the average gap between men's and women's salaries during the transition period has narrowed. Whereas in 1992, women's average pay was 78.4 per cent that of men's, already by 2000, it had increased to 81 per cent.

The protection of motherhood, fatherhood and childhood having been acknowledged as a priority task, the State is implementing special measures for the protection of pregnant women and women with children.

Under the provisions of articles 16 and 268 of the Labour Code, the refusal to conclude an employment contract with a woman or the reduction of her salary because of pregnancy or the existence of children under three years of age or, in the case of a single mother, the existence of a child under 14 years of age (or a disabled child under 18 years of age) is prohibited. When refusing to conclude an employment contract with these categories of women, the employer is required to inform them in writing of the reasons for such refusal. Refusal by an employer to conclude an employment contract may be appealed in a court of law. Pursuant to article 136 of the Criminal Code, the refusal to hire or the dismissal from work of a woman on the grounds of pregnancy and, similarly, the refusal to hire or the dismissal from work of a nursing mother is punishable by attachment of up to one year's earnings or dismissal from office.

The cancellation of an employment contract with a pregnant woman or a woman who has children under three years of age on the initiative of the employer is prohibited, except in cases of closure of the enterprise, institution or organization, or

cessation of activity by the entrepreneur. The cancellation of an employment contract with a single mother who has children from 3 to 14 years of age (or disabled children under 18 years of age) on the initiative of the employer is permitted in cases of the closure of the enterprise, establishment or organization, or cessation of activity by the entrepreneur, as well as on the grounds stipulated in other provisions of labour law (art. 268 of the Labour Code).

Pursuant to article 264 of the Labour Code, pregnant women, in accordance with medical findings, must have their productivity and service requirements reduced or be transferred to alternative, lighter, non-hazardous work on full former average pay.

Until a pregnant woman can be provided with alternative, lighter and non-hazardous work, in accordance with medical findings, she has to be released from work on full former average pay, at the employer's expense, for all the workdays consequently missed.

Pursuant to article 264, in the event that they are unable to carry out their previous work, women with young children under 18 months of age must be transferred to alternative work on full former average pay until the child reaches the age of 18 months.

In the new Labour Code, provisions regulating the granting of maternity leave for 70 calendar days preceding childbirth and 56 (in cases involving complications in childbirth, or the birth of two or more children — 70) calendar days after childbirth, with payment during this period of a State social insurance allowance, have been retained (art. 184). The amount of the maternity allowances is regulated by article 6 of the State allowances for families with children Act of 19 March 2002. The Act, inter alia, provides for an increase in the minimum allowance of up to 50 per cent of the average per capita minimum subsistence budget for each month of maternity leave, and a cap on the maximum amount of the allowance at triple the average wage of manual and white-collar workers in Belarus.

Pursuant to article 185 of the Labour Code, irrespective of length of service, a woman, at her request, may be granted special leave to care for a child until it reaches its third birthday, with payment of a monthly State allowance during that period.

Leave to care for a child until it reaches its third birthday is granted in full or in instalments to the child's mother, or, at the family's discretion, to a working father or other relatives actually caring for the child. The individual's job (post) is safeguarded for the duration of the childcare leave.

The period of childcare leave is included within the total length of service, as well as length of service in the specialized field, occupation or post.

Revision of labour legislation affecting women will involve a progressive shift away from benefits towards State guarantees relating to a child's birth and expanding the right of working fathers to equal participation in caring for the child, while ensuring the preservation of those that are directly connected with the fulfilment of women's reproductive role.

The development of a network of children's pre-school institutions together with infant education and childcare enables women to combine professional activities and study with the fulfilment of household and family responsibilities.

There are currently 4,454 such institutions in Belarus, serving 403,000 children, i.e. 70 per cent of the children of pre-school age. The pre-school coverage indicator for children is at its highest in the Republic's history. This has been achieved through a targeted policy, including the development of a kindergarten and nursery payment mechanism which is affordable for parents. Pre-school institutions currently serve heterogeneous groups of children of mixed ages, with permanent or changing enrolments; they have flexible schedules and provide assistance for raising pre-schoolers at home. All of the above allows families, especially mothers, to select the most appropriate option for pre-school education, and affords them additional opportunities for personal development and professional and social advancement.

To enable women to more easily combine professional and family duties, pursuant to article 265 of the Labour Code, women raising three or more children under 16 years of age and single mothers raising two or more children under 16 years of age are entitled to one day's leave from work each week on an average day's pay.

The legislation in force in Belarus provides for measures to encourage men to share parental responsibilities with women.

In accordance with articles 185 and 271 of the Labour Code, the child's mother or, at the family's discretion, a working father or other relatives caring for the child are granted childcare leave until the child reaches its third birthday. In such event, the person caring for the child until its third birthday receives a monthly State allowance. In accordance with the State allowances for families with children Act, working mothers or fathers or other relatives or adoptive parents (guardians) on childcare leave, women studying under work release arrangements, servicewomen, and female regular and managerial staff of the internal affairs organs are paid a childcare allowance until the child reaches its third birthday; this allowance is equivalent to 35 per cent of the minimum consumer budget of a family of four determined in accordance with the prices of September of the previous year; for non-working women (including women looking after a disabled child until it reaches its eighteenth birthday and women registered as unemployed), the allowance is equivalent to 20 per cent of the minimum consumer budget of a family of four determined in accordance with the prices of September of the previous year.

At their request, the child's mother, father or other relatives actually caring for the child may work part-time (for not more than half of standard monthly working hours) at their main workplace or at another workplace or work from home during the period of childcare leave while maintaining the monthly State allowance (part 4, article 185 of the Labour Code). In addition, they continue to be eligible to receive the full allowance. In case of suspension of leave to care for a child until it reaches its third birthday in order to take up full-time or part-time work, or upon the child's registering in a pre-school institution, the allowance is reduced by one half of the stipulated amount.

In addition, pursuant to statute No. 593 on the procedure for granting and remunerating one day's leave from work per week for mothers raising three or more children or a disabled child under 16 years of age, as well as for single mothers with two or more children in the same age bracket, of 27 May 1997, fathers raising two or more children under 16 years of age without their mothers are granted one day's leave from work per week under the same conditions as the above-mentioned categories of mothers.

In accordance with the Pensions Act, fathers raising disabled children (disabled from birth) for at least eight years before they reach the age of majority are eligible for an old-age pension at 55 years of age after at least 25 years' service if the mother of the disabled child (disabled from birth) has not claimed her acquired right to an old-age pension after caring for a disabled child and has relinquished that right in the father's favour or has not claimed her right to an old-age pension in accordance with the above-mentioned criteria owing to death.

Pursuant to part 4, article 271 of the Labour Code, the benefits granted by law to working mothers ("women-mothers") are extended to fathers raising children without their mother (owing to her death, deprivation of parental rights, extended hospital stay — exceeding one month, or on other grounds).

The needs of families, working parents and women are being met through the development of a social services system offering socio-economic, socio-medical, psycho-pedagogical, socio-legal and household services.

In recent years, the social services infrastructure has been expanding. A new type of institution has emerged, offering various social services to the population. The further development of the social infrastructure and the introduction of new types of service is hampered by inadequate regulatory and legal provisions. A legal framework to regulate the existing social services system has clearly become necessary. To ensure a regulatory framework for this purpose, A model Statute on the National Social Services Centre for Families and Children was approved by decree No. 1,136 of 21 June 1998 of the Council of Ministers.

The work of social welfare institutions in this field is supplemented by the efforts of educational bodies and youth affairs committees. In order to respond appropriately to the changes taking place within the family, the Ministry of Education is taking steps to actively promote the social and pedagogical dimension of the activities of educational bodies. Priority is being accorded to protecting the rights of the child and working with difficult and problem families. A psychological service is being established to that end, as well as diagnostic, rehabilitation and other centres and psycho-pedagogical clinics. Social worker posts have been introduced in educational institutions of all types.

To assist the family, improvements have been made in the organizational and pedagogical capacity to serve heterogeneous and mixed-age groups of children, the work of pre-school institutions with permanent or changing enrolments of children (flexible schedule) and the provision of assistance for raising pre-schoolers at home. A new model for pre-school education is being developed at experimental sites: the kindergarten is an open-plan, socio-pedagogical complex. The network of non-school structures has been preserved and its work has been qualitatively enhanced. The socio-pedagogical functions of non-school structures have been significantly broadened. These structures work with disabled children and difficult adolescents, carry out charitable and sponsored activities and undertake activities to celebrate "Family Day", "Mothers' Day" and "Senior Citizens' Day", and events for children and their parents.

A nationwide, interdepartmental programme has been developed for the purposes of organizing home-based activities for children, teenagers and young people. Eleven centres (143 specialists) offering home-based activities for children

and young people have been set up by the youth affairs committees (departments) under regional (district, municipal) executive committees.

Article 12

The general system of health-care bodies and institutions provides health care for women and various types of medical assistance. The organization and provision of all types of medical care and services to women are regulated by the following basic laws and government decrees:

1. The Health Care Act;
2. The Rights of the Child Act;
3. The Demographic Security Act;
4. The presidential programme "Children of Belarus";
5. The national plan of action for gender equality for the period 2001-2005;
6. The guidelines for implementing demographic policy, taking account of sustainable development of the economy during the transition period;
7. The nationwide programme "Health of the nation";
8. The nationwide programme "Youth of Belarus" for 2000-2003.

Women's reproductive health during the fertile years has traditionally been accorded priority attention in Belarus. In addition, measures have recently been implemented to extend women's health services to cover their entire life cycle, with an emphasis on improving adolescents' reproductive health and women's health during the menopause.

The female population's requirements for medical care and maternity services are met by the Republic's health centres and clinics, which have 6,238 obstetric beds (6.3 per 10,000 persons) and 5,217 gynaecology beds (5.2 per 10,000 persons). Out-patient care is offered by more than 200 women's clinics. The Republic's medical institutions employ 2,614 obstetricians/gynaecologists and more than 6,000 midwives, although doctor coverage in districts with a predominately rural population is one half to one third the coverage in urban areas.

Pursuant to the Health Care Act, medical care is provided free of charge to women.

In virtually all areas of Belarus, regional programmes have been adopted to strengthen reproductive health. A multi-tiered system of perinatal care has been established to ensure that care can be provided in large maternity centres to pregnant women with serious illnesses, and to women in childbirth and newborns requiring intensive care and resuscitation. In 2000, 30 of the largest maternity hospitals catered for approximately 70 per cent of all births (56 per cent in 1990). Maternity hospitals are moving towards a rooming-in system for mothers and babies, as well as wide advocacy and support for breastfeeding. Increasingly, the gender dimension is taken into account in safeguarding reproductive health, whether it be joint childbirth preparation for mothers- and fathers-to-be or the creation of family-friendly maternity wards. To treat married couples suffering from infertility, "marriage and family" clinics have been established in every regional centre and in Minsk; Belarus also has two assisted reproduction centres.

In 2000, women accounted for 53.1 per cent of the total population. In the female population age structure, fertile women (15-49 years of age) account for 50 per cent (46 per cent in 1994). Despite the comparatively large proportion of women of fertile age, the birth rate continues to fall (13.9, 9.8, 9.4 and 9.2 per 1,000 members of the population in 1990, 1995, 2000 and 2001 respectively).

Early registration of pregnant women with obstetricians and gynaecologists are one of the most important factors in safeguarding the health of women and children. Some time ago, an incentive allowance was introduced for pregnant women who registered with prenatal clinics before the twelfth week of pregnancy and were complying fully with doctors' recommendations. As a result, the proportion of women registering in the early stages of pregnancy increased significantly. In 2001, 91.7 per cent of all pregnant women registered with a women's clinic before the twelfth week of pregnancy (81.3 per cent in 1990), while 98 per cent of pregnant women underwent a compulsory medical check-up; 76.3 per cent of pregnant women were diagnosed with various illnesses (53.7 per cent in 1992), including 30.4 per cent with anaemia (16 per cent in 1985), 13 per cent with diseases of the urino-genitary system, 10 per cent with circulatory diseases and 19.3 per cent with dysfunction of the thyroid gland. In 2001, there were 92,019 deliveries, including 16.3 per cent by Caesarean section (7.5 per cent in 1990). There were 92,816 live births, with 4.8 per cent of newborns weighing less than 2.5 kg.

In 2001, 838 infants died before reaching their first birthday, and the infant mortality rate was 9.1 per 1,000 live births. Twelve women died from complications during pregnancy, birth or the post-partum period, and the maternal mortality rate was 12.9 per 100,000 live births.

In recent years, the high morbidity rate among pregnant women has been reflected in the high morbidity rate among newborns, which has more than doubled since 1990, accounting for approximately 270 per 1,000 newborns. The introduction of modern perinatal technologies alongside a series of measures to protect the health of pregnant women has made it possible for the maternal, perinatal and infant mortality rates to be stabilized and reduced overall, but the health of newborns and young children continues to be a cause for concern, if not alarm.

	1990	*1993*	*1995*	*1997*	*2000*	*2001*
Maternal mortality (per 100,000 live births)	21.8	20.4	13.8	25.7	21.3	12.9
Perinatal mortality (per 1,000)	12.5	10.1	12.2	10.3	7.4	6.9
Stillbirths (per 1,000)	6.7	5.05	6.3	5.8	4.3	4.3
Early neonatal mortality (per 1,000)	5.8	5.05	5.9	4.5	3.1	2.6
Neonatal mortality (per 1,000)	7.6	7.2	8.3	7.0	4.7	3.9
Infant mortality (per 1,000)	11.9	12.5	13.3	12.4	9.3	9.1

In recent years in Belarus, considerable attention has been paid to reproductive health problems and measures to safeguard and improve reproductive health. Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and infections, including HIV/AIDS, as well as abortions, account for some of the most widespread reproductive health problems.

In Belarus, as in other countries, more than half of all STDs occur at an early age (15-24 years) when young people have very limited knowledge of such infections. This regrettable situation is caused by a number of factors, above all social. The most significant of these are: high migration; the fall in living standards; spread of prostitution and pornography; change in society's moral values; increased premarital sexual relations, especially among young people; the absence of institutionalized sex education; and the current inability of the health care system to meet the population's needs in the area of sexual and reproductive health.

Syphilis is one of the most widely registered STDs in Belarus. The highest incidence of syphilis occurred in 1996, with 21,616 registered cases, i.e. 209.7 per 100,000 persons. From 1997, the incidence of syphilis showed a tendency to stabilize and progressively diminish, with only 8,024 new cases of syphilis registered in 2001; however, the incidence of syphilis remains relatively high and far exceeds the incidence in developed countries. According to official data, syphilis is one of the most widespread STDs in Belarus, accounting for almost 30 per cent of all STDs. There has been an increase in the proportion of rural inhabitants infected by the disease.

The incidence of syphilis among adolescents (15-19 years of age) is more than double the incidence among the general population, and 70-75 per cent of all new cases of syphilis registered among adolescents are diagnosed in girls. This situation can also be explained by the fact that many girls suffer from low self esteem, do not know how to protect themselves and are often coerced into sexual relations, both by their peers and by older persons.

The four-year decline in the incidence of gonorrhoea was reversed in 1999; in 2001, 8,579 new cases were registered. The incidence of gonorrhoea among adolescents is also several times higher than in the general population. The incidence of other STDs among the population shows an annual increase. Thus, there were 35.6, 48.9 and as many as 79.9 cases of urogenital chlamydial infections per 100,000 persons in 1998, 1999 and 2000 respectively; over the same period, the incidence of ureaplasmal infections rose from 66.7 to 112.8 per 100,000 persons and the incidence of gardnerella vaginitis increased from 32.8 to 124 per 100,000 persons. The sum total of officially registered cases of STDs exceeded 70,000, although the true incidence of STDs is much greater. Up to 50 per cent or more of all STD cases occur among young people under 30 years of age.

Until 1996, Belarus belonged to the group of countries with a low incidence of HIV infections, 5 to 20 new cases being diagnosed each year. By early 1996, 113 cases of HIV had been registered. In 1996, there was a sudden surge in HIV infections among intravenous drug users in the Svetlogorsk district, Gomel region. In 1996, a total of 1,021 new HIV cases was registered. In subsequent years, the figures were as follows: 653, 554, 411, 527 and 1,952 new cases in 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001 respectively. Thus, by 1 June 2002, 4,422 cases of HIV infection had been registered, or 45 cases per 100,000 members of the population.

Overall the years of registration of HIV cases in Belarus, 229 HIV-infected persons have died, including 28 from AIDS (24 adults and four children).

Young people (under 30 years of age) predominate in the HIV age pyramid, accounting for 80.8 per cent of the total, of whom 16.6 per cent are young people

under 20 years of age. In the period 1997-2001, 170 children were born to HIV-infected mothers, 20 of whom were diagnosed HIV-positive.

The majority of HIV-infected persons are in the asymptomatic phase. The infection is mainly spread parenterally (78.4 per cent) through intravenous drug use. An increase in the sexual transmission of HIV is also apparent: sexual transmission accounted for 7.7, 30.5 and 21.6 per cent of HIV cases in 1996, 1999 and 2001 respectively. There is also an increasing geographic spread of HIV; while in 1996, the majority of registered HIV cases were in the Gomel region, HIV-infected persons are now being registered in more than 35 of the Republic's districts.

Abortions constitute one of the most significant reproductive health problems.

In Belarus, abortions are authorized by law. At the woman's request, her pregnancy may be interrupted up to the twelfth week. In weeks 13-22, pregnancy may be interrupted in special circumstances (including medical grounds — serious illness and social grounds — for example if the woman is a minor or a victim of rape). Pregnancy may be interrupted on medical or genetic grounds (if the embryo is found to have a congenital defect incompatible with life) at any time following detection of the defect, taking into account the woman's state of health.

Although the number of abortions performed in Belarus over the past decade has decreased by a factor of almost 2.5, Belarus, like the Russian Federation and other CIS States, belongs to the group of countries with a high abortion rate. Induced abortion continues to be the main method of birth control.

Abortion rate in Belarus
(*Data supplied by maternity hospitals*)

Years	*All abortions (surgical and vacuum aspiration), absolute number*	*Number of abortions per 1,000 women of fertile age*	*Number of abortions per 100 live births*
1990	247 266	101.3	173
1995	186 680	72.6	184
1998	141 051	52.3	152
1999	130 788	45.7	138
2000	116 345	44	123
2001	95 954	36.1	103

Age structure of women obtaining abortions

	Age (Percentage of age group)					
Year	*15-19 years*	*20-24 years*	*25-29 years*	*30-34 years*	*35-40 years*	*40 years or more*
1995	7	26.2	28	20.6	12.6	5.6
1998	10	25.5	25	20	13.8	5.7
2000	9	25.5	25.5	20.1	13.4	6.2
2001	9.2	25.8	25.2	19.8	13.6	6.4

Teenage pregnancy, including teenage abortions and births, poses a particularly serious problem for the quality of reproductive health. In most Western European countries, the teenage pregnancy rate ranges from 5 to 25 per 1,000 girls in the 15-19-year age bracket; in Belarus, the rate for this group was 74, 67, 60 and 54 per 1,000 girls in 1995, 1998, 1999 and 2000 respectively, one of the highest rates in the region.

The main reasons for the persistently high abortion rate are: low level of public awareness of sexual and reproductive health issues and modern methods of contraception; poor quality of family planning services; the insufficiently responsible attitude of most women towards their health; men's extremely low sense of responsibility for preventing their partners' unwanted pregnancies; and the high cost of hormonal contraceptives and their intermittent supply through the pharmaceutical network.

Usage of female contraceptives

	1995	*1997*	*1999*	*2000*
Number of women fitted with intrauterine devices (coils)	705 692	669 969	637 448	612 418
including per 1,000 women of fertile age	272	252	241	231
Number of women using hormonal contraceptives	163 146	196 754	184 175	207 080
including per 1,000 women of fertile age	63	74	70	78

Incidence of infertility in Belarus
(per 100,000 members of the population over 18 years of age, disaggregated by gender)

	1994	*1997*	*2000*
Male infertility	34.1	35.2	41.4
Female infertility	118.8	108.3	104.7

An analysis of women's reproductive health and the state of health of pregnant women in the 1990s reveals that both have significantly deteriorated, even though the traditionally accepted general indicators (such as maternal and infant mortality, number of abortions per 1,000 women of fertile age) show a consistent decline. Meanwhile, the morbidity rate of newborn infants and the health of children under five years of age are worsening. The Ministry of Health's policy in this connection involves compulsory observation of girls over stipulated intervals (6-7, 10-12, 14-16 years of age), with a view to ensuring the timely diagnosis and treatment of conditions affecting the organs of the reproductive system. Belarus also possesses a so-called "fertile reserve" of women 15-40 years of age capable of producing babies in the future. These women are given annual preventive check-ups free of charge by medical specialists, and treatment is prescribed for any conditions diagnosed, as well as appropriate contraception. In addition, women who have expressed the wish

to have a child are given appropriate medical care prior to conception and deficiency prevention treatment (iron, iodine, calcium) during pregnancy to reduce the risk of birth defects and of complications during pregnancy or delivery.

The Committee's concern over the reintroduction of symbols of motherhood (Mothers' Day, Mothers' Award), which it sees as "encouraging women's traditional roles", is groundless. Over the course of many years in Belarus, conditions have been created to allow men and women to choose freely their main sphere of self-fulfilment, whether it be employment, the family, or a combination of both. The State is developing a network of children's and medical institutions and an infrastructure of and social services, thereby allowing parents to combine work and family responsibilities. Labour legislation is moving away from the concept of "mother and child" by offering labour guarantees and benefits to "parents" and "workers with family responsibilities".

Society views the celebration of Mothers' Day and the presentation of a Mothers' Award to mothers with many children as a way of providing recognition to those women who shoulder a dual burden by combining professional and family responsibilities, as well as to those who devote themselves exclusively to the family, especially since child-rearing and housekeeping are recognized as socially useful work under the legislation on marriage and the family.

Article 13

(a) The system of social protection of families with children is defined as the totality of economic, social and legal guarantees and rights established through legislation and the social institutions and establishments ensuring their implementation and creating the conditions for maintaining a system that sustains life and for the active existence of different categories of families with children, especially the socially vulnerable.

In implementing the State Allowances for Families with Children Act, the State is carrying out a policy of providing targeted support for families with children. The system of allowances paid under the Act has covered approximately 708,000 children — 37 per cent of the total number of children. Moreover, allowances are paid to all families with children three years of age irrespective of their material circumstances, and for children over that age, targeted allowances are paid, taking into account total income.

The State Allowances for Families with Children Act (version of 19 March 2002) entered into force on 1 April 2002.

Pursuant to this Act, families with children are awarded the following State allowances:

- For pregnancy and maternity;
- In connection with the birth of a child;
- For mothers registered with medical institutions before the twelfth week of pregnancy;
- For the care of a child up to three years of age;
- For children over three years of age;

- For children aged 3 to 16 (students attending secondary day schools, colleges of higher education and similar types of educational institutions until their graduation; non-working students attending evening (shift) schools while at the same time learning an occupation; disabled children, and students attending secondary specialized schools and vocational and technical schools and courses at their own expense, working during the daytime under the regime of educational institutions and not receiving a scholarship, up to the age of 18;
- For the care of a sick child up to 14 years of age;
- For the care of a child up to three years of age and of a disabled child up to 18 years of age in the event of the mother's illness or that of any other person actually caring for the child;
- For the care of a disabled child up to 18 years of age;
- For the care of disabled children in sanitoria/boarding schools;
- For the care of children suffering from HIV/AIDS, up to 18 years of age.

The Act establishes a new approach to determining the amount of allowances and total income, entitling families with children over three years of age to receive them. The amount of the allowances is established as a percentage of the minimum subsistence budget, and not of the minimum consumer budget, as in the Act previously in force. This is due to the fact that pursuant to the Minimum Subsistence Act, the minimum subsistence budget is established as a basic criterion for the recognition of citizens and families as impoverished, and also as a basis for the establishment of minimum State social guarantees.

Allowances in connection with the birth of a child are established at double the rate of the minimum subsistence budget, and incentive allowances for women registered with prenatal clinics before the twelfth week of pregnancy are established at the rate of the minimum subsistence budget.

Allowances for the care of a child under three years of age are established for working women at the rate of 65 per cent, for non-working women at the rate of 35 per cent, and for children over three years of age, at the rate of 30 per cent of the minimum subsistence budget.

Allowances for the care of a disabled child under 18 years of age are established at the rate of 65 per cent of the minimum subsistence budget and are paid to non-working persons not receiving a pension who are actually caring for the child.

In lieu of the two types of allowances paid under the previous Act for children under 18 months of age, a supplement at the rate of 75 per cent of the established allowance has been introduced for women who have children out of wedlock, if information concerning the child's paternity is entered in the vital statistics register on instructions from the mother (formerly "the single mother").

A supplement at the rate of 40 per cent of the allowance is provided for separate categories of families, specifically incomplete ones, where children are raised by one parent and the other parent refuses to pay maintenance; families with disabled children under 18 years of age; and families with members serving in the armed forces for a fixed period.

Changes were also made to the amount of the allowances for pregnancy and maternity. In particular, the Act provides for an increase in the minimum amount of the allowance of up to 50 per cent of the average per capita minimum subsistence budget for each month of maternity leave, and a cap on the maximum amount of the allowance at triple the average wage of manual and white-collar workers in the Republic. This limitation affects an extremely small number of women.

Since 1 January 2001, additional targeted social assistance has been provided to poor families, including those with many children, incomplete families, families with disabled children under 18 years of age and those in which both parents are unemployed. Targeted social assistance is provided if the total average income per person for the three months preceding the month in which assistance is applied for does not exceed 60 per cent of the average per capita minimum subsistence budget in effect on the date of application, as confirmed by means of established procedure, and its amount for one recipient constitutes the difference between a sum equal to 60 per cent of the average per capita minimum subsistence budget in effect on the date of the application and the total average family income per person.

Incomplete families with many children constitute 94 per cent of the recipients of targeted social assistance.

Within the system of material assistance to families with children, the State also employs benefits such as tax exemptions, payment for the maintenance of children in pre-school institutions, payment for textbooks and school supplies, and provision of free meals for children during the first two years of life.

In accordance with the Income Tax Act, which came into force on 1 January 1999, income for the maintenance of children or dependants is deducted from income at the rate of double the minimum wage for each child under 18 years of age or each dependant, for each month of the year during which or for which the income is received.

The income referred to is deducted from the month in which the child is born or responsibility for the dependant is assumed and continues until the end of the month in which children have attained 18 years of age, students have attained 23 years of age or a natural person has ceased to be a dependant, or until the end of the month in which the death of the children or dependants has occurred.

The income is deducted for both spouses, a widow or widower, a single parent or guardian or trustee, by whom a child (dependant) is supported, on the basis of documents confirming the existence of the child (dependant).

In the current Act (1999 version) there are no rules governing the provision of allowances in the form of a tax rebate for single mothers who have two or more children or for two-parent families with three or more children.

Policy concerning the status of elderly people, including elderly women, is reflected in the integrated national programme dealing with the problems of the elderly which was drawn up and adopted in compliance with decision No. 578 of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus on "Measures in connection with the Day of the Elderly", of 23 September 1992.

An integral part of the work of local executive bodies and social welfare departments is to survey the living conditions of elderly persons and, based on the results of the survey, to draw up measures for providing concrete assistance to

citizens who are unable to work and on low incomes. They are provided with financial assistance, assistance in kind and humanitarian help.

One of the goals of social welfare for elderly and disabled persons is to provide social services in the form of outreach services.

For particularly difficult cases which rule out care in the home, a form of care such as nursing care departments (wards) set up in district hospitals is used.

There are currently 1,936 hospital beds for nursing care available. The greatest number of beds are operated in the Vitebsk (435 beds), Brest (375), Minsk (328) and Gomel (297) regions.

Social services centres are being revived to service the population in small and remote localities. At the 176 social services centres operating in the Republic, the premises have been equipped for trade, work by medical teams and domestic services. Cultural events and meetings with information groups and social welfare department workers are held at these centres.

Nursing homes accommodating from 8 to 20 veterans are being started up and financed by enterprises and local executive bodies.

In order to improve social services to elderly people a Model Statute on the Social Services Centre for Elderly and Disabled Citizens was ratified in August 1999. The main aim of establishing such centres is to provide maximum and varied assistance to people in their own homes and to strive to give them a chance to stay at home within their familiar surroundings until their final days, and only in extreme cases to move them into hospital care.

In implementation of measures for holding an International Year of Older Persons, the Ministry of Social Welfare has drawn up a Programme of Support for National and Local Veterans' Organizations for the Period 2000-2005.

In order to solve the problem of raising the level of pension provision and increasing the differentiation of pensions depending on previous earnings, a decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus was adopted on 22 March 1999 on "Additional Measures to Improve Pension Provision for Citizens". As a result of implementation of the decree, the level of pension provision was raised for more than a third of pensioners. The rate of the increase in pensions for them varied depending on the individual's wage and length of service prior to retirement and was equivalent to as much as 37.8 per cent (6 per cent on average). At the same time a rise in pensions is planned for non-working pensioners as well as for pensioners engaged directly in agricultural production in collective farms, State farms and other agricultural enterprises.

(C) In accordance with article 32, paragraph 5, of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, "Women are guaranteed equal rights with men in their opportunities to receive education and vocational training, in employment and promotion at work, and in socio-political, cultural and other spheres of activity, as well as in the creation of conditions for the protection of their labour". This provision has been laid down in a range of legal and regulatory acts — the acts of the Republic of Belarus on Culture, Scientific Activity and Physical Education and Sports.

Article 14

Article 10 of the Act of the Republic of Belarus on "Priority Sociocultural and Economic Development of Rural Areas and the Agro-Industrial Complex" establishes the following benefits for women working in rural areas:

- At least 28 calendar days of basic annual leave;
- For those involved in direct agricultural production, one additional day of leave per month with maintenance of the average wage.

Women working on collective or State farms or in other agricultural enterprises who have had five or more children and raised them to the age of 16 are entitled to a pension regardless of age after at least 20 years' service in direct agricultural production (including absences to care for the children) or after at least 10 years' service (not including absences to care for the children).

In the process of reform of the political and economic system of society, starting opportunities for rural and urban women proved to be far from equal. This made it difficult for many rural women to adapt to new social and economic conditions and their social situation has sharply worsened. This can be seen both in their unfairly low wages and triple workload — at work, at home and on their personal plots — and in their sharply exacerbated working conditions. Discontent with the poor quality of life, the lack of comfortable housing, and insufficient prospects for professional and social growth have led to a sharp drop in the prestige of agricultural work among young people, resulting in the migration of young people, especially girls, from rural areas.

The exodus of young people is having an impact on the gender balance in the rural population. According to the 1999 census, for every 1,000 men, there were 1,192 women, including 1,123 in urban areas and 1,144 in rural areas, as compared with 1,131, 1,127 and 1,140 respectively at the beginning of 2000. Thus, the gender and age imbalance in the population is more pronounced in rural areas.

Working conditions and social conditions in the countryside have an impact on mortality and longevity indicators. In 1999-2000, for example, the mortality rate among rural women rose by 20 per cent. The negative mortality trends substantially changed the trends in the indicators of life expectancy at birth, which decreased for women from 74.7 in 1990 to 72.6 in 1997, rising slightly thereafter to 72.9 in 2000. Moreover, in 2000, this indicator was 2.5 years lower for rural women than for urban women.

In analysing the trend in the indicators of life expectancy at birth, it should be noted that the drop in this indicator was more significant for the male rural population, from 63.9 in 1990 to 60.4 in 2000.

There were 260,600 women working in agriculture in 2000, representing 11.2 per cent of the total number of women employed in the economic sectors of the Republic. The majority of these women perform unskilled manual labour in crop-raising and animal husbandry. Agriculture developed over a long period of time under conditions of a constant decrease in the number of persons employed, with higher unemployment rates among women.

Wages for women working in agriculture in 2000 stood at 62.4 per cent of the average wage of women in the economic sectors of the Republic. Also characteristic

of this sector was an insignificant differential in the wages of men and women, amounting to 6 per cent at most.

A peculiarity of poverty in the Republic is that it depends on the place of residence. The proportion of households in the countryside with average available resources per person below the minimum subsistence level was 26.2 per cent in 2001 (22.8 per cent in urban areas). In addition, for households with children under 18, this indicator stood at 42.9 per cent (33.6 per cent in urban areas), and for families with three or more children, it was 75.6 per cent (62.6 per cent in urban areas).

In urban settlements the proportion of the population living below the poverty threshold fell from 35 per cent in 1995 to 26.7 per cent in 2001; in rural areas, it fell from 44.1 per cent to 33.6 per cent.

The production of agricultural produce on the personal plots of rural residents and in the country homes and market gardens of urban residents continues to have a substantial impact on the standard of living of the population. As at 1 January 2000 the proportion of households owning a plot of land was 63.8 per cent, both in urban settlements (48.7 per cent) and in rural areas (92.7 per cent). Production on these plots is basically for household use (93 per cent), but at the same time it is offered for sale and used to provide assistance to relatives and friends (7 per cent).

Household research has shown that nearly one quarter of the respondents (24 per cent) mentioned income from the sale of produce from their personal plots (meat, milk, vegetables and fruit). Income from these sales as a share of total income in 2000 was 3.4 per cent; in urban areas it was 0.4 per cent, and in rural areas, 11.5 per cent.

Accordingly, taking into account all types of income, including from sales and from the use of produce grown on personal plots (cash and in-kind income), the level of poverty in rural areas is declining significantly.

In characterizing the distribution of households below the poverty threshold, note should be taken of the inequality in the allotment of social benefits depending on the place of residence. During the first quarter of 2002, for instance, the average amount of social benefits received per family was 1.7 times higher in urban than in rural areas, particularly in terms of food (1.23 times higher), payment for the maintenance of children in pre-school institutions and for children's education (1.7 times higher) and payment for medicines (2.6 times higher). This is partially offset by the allotment of targeted social assistance. In rural areas, for instance, the proportion of families which received such assistance out of the total number of families which applied for it was twice as high as in urban areas.

With a view to a more active involvement of women in reform of the agrarian sector in the Republic, a series of measures is being implemented to increase their competitiveness in the labour market. In the agricultural institutes training is being offered in new specializations. The list of occupations for which training is given in rural vocational and technical institutes has been revised. In the agricultural production institutes, work has begun on the multidisciplinary vocational training of girls for work in peasants' (farmers') holdings through the integrated occupation of "farm managers". Girls learning this occupation generally learn three specializations out of the seven offered: vegetable and fruit grower, milking machine operator,

animal husbandry and farm complex operator, laboratory assistant for chemical and bacteriological analysis, cook, seamstress, sales clerk.

Women constitute 30.9 per cent of those studying in agricultural institutes, which train people for work in agriculture, and 26.5 per cent in secondary specialized schools. Taking into account the special significance of the agrarian sector of the economy and the worsening of the social-demographic structure of the population, there is a need to build up the technical base through mini-technologies for farmers' holdings and to improve living conditions in rural areas. Currently in the Republic the State is implementing an active migration policy aimed, in particular, at regulating the geographical displacement of experts from various disciplines (especially agricultural experts) working in rural areas. All these measures are being implemented taking into account the particularity of rural women's life activity, place and role in the development of rural areas.

In order to promote the employment of unemployed persons and to supply workers for enterprises of the agro-industrial complex, during the first nine months of 2001, 252 families of unemployed persons were assigned to rural areas by the State Employment Service for resettlement to a new place of residence and employment, with financial support provided for them from the State Employment Promotion Fund. Women were placed in jobs in the following occupations: milkers, calf-herds, field-crop growers, agronomists, veterinarians, bookkeepers, economists and others.

The organs of the State Employment Service conduct vocational training for unemployed women in agricultural occupations and specializations, and provide vocational training to order for agricultural enterprises and collective and State farms.

In accordance with the Pensions Act, women are generally entitled to a pension when they reach 55 years of age and provided their length of service is at least 20 years.

There is provision for certain categories of women employed in agriculture to retire on preferential terms (before reaching the generally specified pensionable age). Women who have worked at least 20 years milking cows (operating milking machines) or raising calves or pigs on collective or State farms or in other agricultural enterprises are entitled to a retirement pension upon reaching the age of 50. For women who have worked the minimum labour quota in the social unit of a collective farm, the entire period of their work is included in their length of service which entitles them to preferential pension provision. Women working on collective or State farms or in other agricultural enterprises who have had five or more children and raised them to the age of 16 are entitled to a pension regardless of age after at least 10 years' service in direct agricultural production (not including absences to care for the children).

Taking into consideration the specific nature of agricultural work, the Pensions Act provides for pensioners who have been employed directly in agricultural production on collective or State farms or in other agricultural enterprises to be paid their pensions in full. (In certain circumstances, restrictions apply to the payment of a pension in respect of persons employed after being awarded a pension in other sectors of the economy.)

In order to solve the problem of raising the level of pension provision and increasing the differentiation of pensions depending on previous earnings, a decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus was adopted on 22 March 1999 on "Additional Measures to Improve Pension Provision for Citizens". As a result of implementation of the decree, the level of pension provision was raised for more than a third of pensioners. The rate of the increase in pensions for them varied depending on the individual's wage and length of service prior to retirement and was equivalent to as much as 37.8 per cent (6 per cent on average). At the same time a rise in pensions is planned for non-working pensioners as well as for pensioners employed directly in agricultural production in collective farms, State farms and other agricultural enterprises.

Article 15

1. The Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, together with the provision in article 2, paragraph 3 whereby "the State shall guarantee the rights and freedoms of the citizens of Belarus that are enshrined in the Constitution and the laws and specified in the State's international obligations", establishes the principle of equality for all before the law. It also provides for the right to equal protection of rights and lawful interests, without any discrimination (art. 22 of the Constitution).

Article 23, paragraph 1 of the Constitution allows for the restriction of individual rights and freedoms only in cases stipulated by the law, in the interest of national security, public order, the protection of morality and public health or the rights and freedoms of other persons.

2. The new Civil Code of the Republic of Belarus was adopted on 7 July 1997 and came into force on 1 July 1999.

Article 2 of the Civil Code, on the basic foundation of civil legislation, sets out principles defining and regulating civil relations.

Under article 2, the subjects of civil law participate in civil relations on an equal footing, are equal before the law, may not enjoy advantages or privileges that are at variance with the law and have the right, without any discrimination, to equal protection of their rights and lawful interests (principle of equality of persons participating in civil relations).

Article 2, paragraph 1 provides that citizens and legal persons may freely enter into contracts.

Article 2, paragraph 3 states that participants in civil relations acquire and exercise their civil rights of their own free will and in their own interests. They are free to assert their rights and obligations on the basis of a contract and to establish in it any terms which are not contrary to the law.

Issues relating to the legal and dispositive capacity of citizens are regulated by the provisions of chapter 3, "Citizens (natural persons)" of subsection 2 ("Persons") of the Civil Code, which guarantees equal civil capacity (art. 16) and dispositive capacity (art. 20) for all citizens.

Article 16 states that all citizens equally have the capacity to have civil rights and obligations (capacity under civil law). The legal capacity of a citizen arises at the time of his birth and terminates with his death.

Article 61 of the Constitution states that all persons are entitled to the protection of their rights and freedoms before a competent, independent and impartial court within a period defined by the law.

4. Under article 30 of the Constitution, citizens have the right to travel freely and to choose their place of residence within the borders of the Republic of Belarus, to leave it, and to return to it unimpeded.

Article 16

An examination of Belarusian family law from a gender perspective shows that current family legislation is founded upon strict observance of the principle of equality between spouses, on the basis of the constitutional principle of equality between men and women, and also the principle of equal rights for spouses in family relations (art. 32 of the Constitution).

In the new Marriage and Family Code of the Republic of Belarus, which came into force on 1 September 1999, the principle of equality is enshrined in article 1, which establishes the basic principles of family law. That article states that family relations are based on equal rights for both spouses within the family and on mutual love and respect and mutual assistance among all family members.

The legal regulation of marital and family relations in the Republic of Belarus is the prerogative of the State. The Republic recognizes only marriages contracted in State registry offices. Religious ceremonies relating to marital and family issues have no legal significance (Marriage and Family Code of the Republic of Belarus, art. 4).

The Marriage and Family Code, article 12, states that marriage is a voluntary union of man and woman, concluded under the procedure and conditions and in accordance with the requirements of the law, that its purpose is the founding of a family and that it gives rise to mutual rights and duties for the parties. In order to enter into marriage both parties must be consenting and have reached marriageable age, and there must be no impediments to the marriage as set out in article 19 of the Marriage and Family Code (art. 17).

Article 18 of the same Code sets the legal age for marriage at 18 for both women and men. If a child has been born to the couple or if there is a certificate of registration of a pregnancy, or in the case of a person under 18 who has been emancipated, and provided that the other conditions for contracting a marriage as stipulated in article 17 of the Code are met, the State registry office may lower the minimum age of marriage established by law, but by no more than three years.

The rights and duties of spouses arise as of the date of registration of the marriage by a State registry office (art. 20).

Family relations are regulated in accordance with the principles of the voluntary nature of the union between husband and wife (the Marriage and Family Code, arts. 1 and 12) and the joint settlement of marital and family issues by mutual agreement (art. 20).

The equality of spouses' rights within the family is expressed first and foremost in the fact that husband and wife have equal rights in terms of the resolution of all matters relating to their shared life, and this principle is enshrined in other articles of the Marriage and Family Code which regulate the spouses'

specific rights and duties. Thus, article 21 of the Code provides for the right of spouses at the time of their wedding to choose the family name of one of the spouses as their shared name or to retain their own names. Article 22 provides for the right of the spouses freely to choose their occupation and place of residence.

Under article 23 of the Marriage and Family Code spouses have equal rights in the ownership, use and disposal of property acquired during the marriage, regardless of which of them acquired it or by whom or on whose account the financial resources were provided.

Unless the marriage contract provides otherwise, equal rights also apply in relation to jointly acquired property in cases where one of the spouses has, during the marriage, been occupied with housekeeping or childcare or for other valid reasons did not have his or her own salary (income).

The Marriage and Family Code, for the first time, established the marriage contract as a means of governing the relations between spouses. Under article 13 of the Code, the marriage contract is recognized as an agreement between the spouses relating to joint property and the individual property of each of them and, should the marriage be dissolved, the procedure for dividing the spouses' joint property and their material obligations towards each other; the manner, methods and means of their children's upbringing; the childrens' place of residence, amount of child support, visitation arrangements for the non-custodial parent and also other issues of the support and upbringing of children in the event of dissolution of the marriage.

The marriage contract may also regulate other aspects of the relationship between the spouses, subject to the provisions of marital and family law (art. 13 of the Code).

A marriage may be dissolved by a court of law on application by one of the spouses. Dissolution cannot be granted during pregnancy or during the first three years following the birth of a child, unless the other spouse has given written consent for the divorce (arts. 34-35 of the Code).

In order to protect the legal rights of under-age children, the Code has for the first time created the possibility for the spouses, upon dissolution of the marriage, to enter into an agreement relating to the children (art. 38). In such an agreement, the parents determine where the children are to live, the amounts of child support, visitation arrangements for the non-custodial parent and other aspects of the children's life and upbringing in accordance with their rights (art. 38).

Should the parent with whom the children are living require State assistance in resolving problems relating to the children's care and upbringing, the following forms of financial support are available:

- Financial benefits for low-income families;
- Placement of pre-school children in a day-care centre providing round-the-clock care, and of schoolchildren in a general educational boarding school if the parent's work schedule requires him or her to work at night.

Children may go home from boarding school at the end of the day's lessons; in addition, they spend days off, public holidays and school vacations with their parents. Parents are also free to visit their children in the boarding school at their convenience.

In cases where the parents have divorced, the children remain with one of the parents or a close relative such as a grandparent, or enter a State boarding institution. Maintenance in a boarding institution is a form of financial support for families experiencing financial difficulties, generally single-parent families where the mother is working. It takes place with the mother's consent, and she is able to spend time with the child as needed. The children spend days off, public holidays and school vacations at home.

One urgent issue in the area of marital and family relations is that of the recovery of maintenance payments. In order to better ensure the material welfare of children in case of divorce, the new Marriage and Family Code makes it possible for the resources of the Social Welfare Fund to be used to make up shortfalls in maintenance payments resulting from disruption of business activities or other factors beyond the control of the liable person, subject to later refund by the employer of the sums disbursed.

Any dispute arising between the spouses relating to the division of their joint property (art. 41 of the Code) or to recovery of alimony (art. 40), as well as disputes concerning child support and the upbringing of children (art. 39) are dealt with by the courts.

Under article 68 of the Code, the parents have equal individual non-property-related rights and obligations, including rights and obligations in determining a child's given name, patronymic and family name, its citizenship in those cases provided for by the law, and its place of residence; in the children's upbringing, care and supervision, in their representation and in the protection of their rights and legal interests.

The Marriage and Family Code clearly establishes anti-discrimination rules concerning the equality of rights between parents in resolving issues relating to their children. Under article 76 of the Code, the father and mother have equal rights and duties in relation to their children. The parents also enjoy equal rights and carry equal responsibilities concerning their children in the case of the dissolution of the marriage, unless otherwise provided for in a formal agreement concerning the children.

Under article 75 of the Code, the parents are obliged to take care of their children's physical, mental and moral development, their health, their upbringing and their preparation for independent life in society. The same article emphasizes that all issues relating to the children's upbringing shall be resolved by both parents by mutual agreement. In the absence of such agreement, the dispute shall be resolved by the guardianship and trusteeship body, with the participation of the parents. Appeals against such decisions may be made through the courts.

The parents confirm their authority over the protection of their children's rights and interests by means of documents relating to parenthood, such as the child's birth certificate, and also their own passports (art. 73).

Under article 125 of the Code, children may be adopted by persons of either sex who are of legal age, and also by those not of age but having full dispositive capacity. The following are excluded: persons who have been declared incompetent by a court of law; married couples, where one of the spouses has been declared by a court to be incompetent or of limited competence; persons who have been deprived of their parental rights entirely or partially by a court of law; persons who have been

discharged from their obligations as guardians or trustees owing to improper fulfilment of the responsibilities entrusted to them; former adoptive parents, if the adoption has been revoked by a court through some fault of theirs; persons who at the time of adoption do not have an income sufficient to provide to the adopted child the legal minimum standard of living; persons having no fixed place of residence or living in accommodation which does not comply with legal sanitary and technical requirements; persons who at the time of adoption have a conviction for a premeditated offence; or persons who for health reasons are unable to exercise the rights and comply with the obligations of parents.

The status of guardian or trustee can be held by persons of either sex who are of legal age, and also by those not of age but having full dispositive capacity. The following are excluded: persons who have been declared incompetent or of limited competence by a court of law; persons who for health reasons are unable to exercise the rights and comply with the obligations of guardians or trustees; persons who have been deprived of their parental rights by a court of law; former adoptive parents, if the adoption has been revoked owing to improper fulfilment of the responsibilities entrusted to them; or persons who have been discharged from their obligations as guardians or trustees owing to improper fulfilment of the responsibilities entrusted to them (art. 153 of the Code).

Belarusian legislation pays considerable attention to issues of reconciling family and work obligations; these are particularly important for women. Under article 3 of the Code, the State demonstrates its concern for the family by creating conditions for the economic independence and greater well-being of the family. These include a policy of reduced taxation, payment of State allowances to families with children, and preferential credit. The State is developing a network of child welfare and medical institutions and amenities, thereby giving parents the possibility of combining employment with the fulfilment of family responsibilities. At the same time, child-rearing and housekeeping are recognized as socially useful work.

The basic principles of State family policy, established by Presidential Decree No. 41 of 21 January 1998, are the principles of equal rights for women and men in the achievement of equitable sharing of family responsibilities, and also in opportunities for self-fulfilment in the area of employment and in public life (para. 3).

Priorities in the implementation of State family policy include the creation of favourable conditions to enable parents to combine outside employment with the fulfilment of their family responsibilities, including the extension of the rights of the father and other family members to the benefits currently granted at the workplace to mothers in relation to the upbringing of their children (para. 4.2).

One of the most gender-sensitive areas of family law is the reproductive rights of citizens. The connection between reproductive rights and family law is obvious: parenthood is essentially the direct result of the exercise by citizens of their reproductive rights. Until recently, however, this area lay almost entirely outside the legal system of the Republic of Belarus; this is due to the fact that reproductive rights are a new concept in Belarusian legislation.

At the same time, a sharp deterioration in the reproductive health of the population, a fall in the birth rate and increased international awareness of

reproductive rights and reproductive health have begun to draw increased attention to these issues in Belarus.

Under article 20 of the Marriage and Family Code, as mentioned above, parenthood issues are resolved jointly by the spouses in accordance with the principle of equality. This situation, however, is admissible only insofar as it does not infringe upon the freedom of each of the spouses to make decisions. In case of a disagreement or dispute over parenthood, each parent is entirely free to make a final decision. This applies equally to situations where a woman wishes to have a child and her husband objects or, on the contrary, where the woman does not wish to have a child but her husband opposes an abortion.

Increased attention is currently being paid in Belarus to developing a system for protecting families' reproductive health, providing families with the possibility to use at their discretion the necessary information on family planning, and also disseminating up-to-date information on the culture of reproductive behaviour.

Thus, article 20 of the Health Care Act, in the version of 11 January 2002, categorizes measures for family planning and maternal, paternal and child health care as basic, accessible types of medical assistance.

Articles 33-35 of the same instrument regulate assisted reproduction sterilization and induced abortion.

The national plan of action for gender equality for the period 2002-2005 also contains measures for the protection of reproductive health, including broadening the range of family-planning services, sex education for young people and preventing sexually transmitted diseases. A number of measures are designed to encourage responsible behaviour by men with regard to reproductive and sexual health. In particular, there are plans to carry out the programme "Partnership in childbirth" from joint childbirth preparation for mothers-and-fathers-to-be to the creation of family-friendly maternity wards. There is also a section providing for measures to broaden health-care services for women throughout their lifetimes.

The UNFPA Office in Belarus plays a major role carrying out measures to ensure the reproductive rights of men and women, including the provision of modern contraceptive devices.

Part III

A. Progress achieved in enhancing the status of women

The social and economic reforms carried out in Belarus during the 1990s contributed to the establishment of the elements of a market economy, the creation of a non-State sector and the emergence of new relations in the labour market. These economic reforms and a reassessment of spiritual values were accompanied by a rethinking of women's role in society.

The resulting changes expanded women's opportunities for self-fulfilment and provided women with many opportunities for participation in the country's social, employment, political and public life.

During the period 1994-2001 legal, organizational and administrative measures were taken in Belarus, within existing resources, to raise the status of women, protect women's rights and interests, and mitigate the adverse effects of the transition period.

During this period the national plan of action to improve the situation of women for the period 1996-2000 and a programme entitled "Women of the Republic of Belarus" were successfully implemented.

Throughout the period under review efforts to improve national legislation, bringing it into line with international legal norms, continued. This process has been supplemented by efforts to enhance women's legal literacy. The most significant changes in this area have been the adoption of the new Marriage and Family Code and the new Labour Code.

The period 1994-2001 also saw the approval, through presidential decrees, and the adoption, through government decisions, of 15 documents which have major significance for the effort to increase the social protection afforded to families, women and children, and for the development of a system of social services. These included the presidential programme entitled "Children of Belarus" (1998-2000); the Act amending and supplementing the State Allowances for Families with Children Act of the Republic of Belarus (1997 and 1998); the Social Service Act (2000); a presidential decree on the fundamental aims of State family policy (1998) and government decisions setting out priority measures for achieving the fundamental aims of State family policy (1998); and model regulations governing the national social services centre for families and children.

The period 1994-2000 was characterized by a marked strengthening of the role of local authorities and administrative bodies and the implementation of measures to enhance the status of women in all areas and prevent gender-based discrimination. At the regional level, special programmes are being formulated which cover efforts to address the problems faced by women, families and children in society; assistance in the area of women's employment; protection of health; and the guaranteeing of reproductive and other rights. Coordinating councils are being established in the regional executive committees to address family-related issues and protect children's rights. Experts from the labour, social welfare, education, public health and internal affairs departments and representatives of public organizations are involved in this process.

The period 1994-2000 saw the establishment of a national mechanism to implement a policy for ensuring gender equality and the elimination of discrimination against women. To promote the development and implementation of a gender policy in Belarus, a National Council on Gender Policy was established within the Council of Ministers of the Republic in May 2000. Representatives of legislative and executive bodies and public associations as well as scholars participated in this effort.

An important mechanism for action during the reporting period has been the holding of a series of applied scientific conferences, round tables and training seminars at the national and local levels to review the current situation and formulate strategies and tactics for enhancing the status of women.

There has been a significant increase in the activities of women's organizations, which have become a fundamental component of civil society. During

the period under review these organizations experienced considerable growth, both in their number and in the type of activities undertaken. There are currently 20 national women's organizations active in Belarus. Each runs a series of specific projects that seek to address various problems facing women. The range of activities is extremely broad, from helping women find employment to educating women to make them more aware of their rights.

Cooperation between women's associations and government bodies in the implementation of national policy to enhance the status of women is increasing.

In addition to the international instruments it had already ratified, Belarus signed the final documents of the Beijing Conference in 1995, thereby affirming its readiness to assume concrete obligations relating to the implementation of a policy to enhance the status of women.

From 1997 to 2000, as an expression of its support for efforts to promote and protect human rights, Belarus prepared documents relating to the country's participation in the following instruments:

Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (instrument of accession deposited on 23 January 2002);

Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (signed on 29 April 2002);

United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (signed in December 2000);

Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (signed in December 2000);

Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction (instrument of accession deposited on 12 January 1998);

Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Intercountry Adoption (signed by Belarus on 10 December 1997).

Steps are being taken to permit Belarus to become a party to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

The period under review was marked by a gradual increase in women's participation in decision-making in the political, economic and social spheres. Following the elections in 2000-2001, the number of women deputies in the legislature more than doubled (from 4.5 per cent to 10.3 per cent). Women's involvement in the work of local elected councils of deputies at all levels has gradually increased, as has their participation in the work of executive bodies.

Gender-based statistics have been compiled, providing greater opportunities for a comparative analysis of the men's and women's positions. A statistical compilation entitled "Women and Men of the Republic of Belarus" was published in 1999 and 2001.

One positive effect of the rise in women's status has been an increase in information exchanges and cooperation with women's organizations in other countries.

New emphasis has been placed on gender research. The most striking example has been the preparation and publication in 1997 of a national report entitled "Belarusian Women as Seen Through an Era" as part of the UNDP "Women in development" project and the conducting of three sociological studies on violence against women. The question of the status of women has received wider coverage in the mass media. A system of gender education is in the early stages of development. Courses on gender issues are being taught in one quarter of all institutes of higher learning in Belarus.

To provide support to women in difficult situations, a network of social service centres for families and children has been set up and is being developed. From 1998 to 2001 the number of such centres grew to 24.

Recognition of the significance and complexity of the problem of traffic in persons led to the adoption of a national programme, covering the period 2002-2007, of comprehensive measures to prevent traffic in persons and prostitution.

Many of these achievements would have been much more difficult had it not been for the close cooperation of the Government and the United Nations Office in Belarus within the framework of the UNDP projects on women in development and support for the activities of the Centre for Gender Information and Policy. The Centre, which was created during implementation of the first project, has actively assisted the national machinery in the implementation of gender policy during these years.

In May 2001 the Government of Belarus approved the second national plan of action for gender equality for the period 2001-2005; the plan seeks above all to create conditions that will provide equal opportunities for both sexes and reduce the gap between their de jure and de facto equality in all areas of life. In developing the new plan, consideration was given to the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which were made following the Committee's consideration of the third periodic report of Belarus in January 2000.

B. Remaining obstacles

The problem of gender discrimination in employment and dismissals, the guaranteeing of women's right to fair and equal pay for work equal in value to that done by men and the creation of favourable conditions of work, taking into account women's reproductive function, and of economic and social guarantees for the successful combining of professional and family obligations continue to be highly topical issues throughout the world.

In Belarus, as in other countries, serious obstacles stand in the way of a solution to these problems. Among these obstacles are:

The inertia that tends to characterize social processes, which is reflected in the lag between the time a measure on behalf of women is adopted and the time significant results are achieved through its implementation, and the fact that it takes a long time to develop new protective mechanisms capable of responding to possible new socio-economic phenomena.

Another factor slowing down the process in this area is the complex economic situation, which is further aggravated by the need to allocate more than 10 per cent of the State budget for efforts to eliminate the effects of the disaster at the Chernobyl atomic energy plant.

Moreover, even though there are no legislative provisions that discriminate against women, the guarantees set out in these measures are not always fully implemented in practice. The process of enhancing the effectiveness of legislation, especially labour legislation, is not helped by the fact that neither draft legislative and regulatory texts nor the legislation in force are informed by the requisite gender expertise.

There are instances of violations of Belarusian legislation in respect of women's entry into and dismissals from the workforce. Over 12 per cent of working women are employed in facilities that do not meet sanitary or health standards.

Over the past decade, financial insecurity has grown among both women and men. The share of men having per capita incomes below the standard minimum rose from 39.4 per cent in 1995 to 42.9 per cent in 2000, while the corresponding figures for women rose from 37.4 per cent to 41.0 per cent.

The persistence in society of stereotypes with regard to men's and women's social roles, the inadequate development of civil society structures and the reluctance of society as a whole to accept new notions of equal opportunity all have an impact on efforts to enhance women's social status. Problems of gender equality are still viewed by many as being exclusively women's issues rather than being viewed in the overall context of socio-economic problems.

Yet another serious obstacle is the insufficient involvement of men in efforts to ensure gender equality.

A major problem is the lack of statistical data on many issues and the lack of in-depth research on the influence of transformational processes on all aspects of women's and men's activities.

While a national mechanism for the implementation of gender policy at the local level is slowly being created, the level of qualification of experts in this field is noticeably inadequate.

Today women in Belarus continue to be insufficiently represented at the decision-making level in legislative and executive government bodies.